

The Atlantic

**The War on
Stupid People**
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**Solving the Mystery
of Jesus's Wife**
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How American Politics Went Insane

It didn't start with Trump.
It's going to get worse.
Is there a cure?

By Jonathan Rauch

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+

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Annualized Total Return by Sector (1985-2015): Health Care (14.93%); Consumer Staples (14.47%); Energy (11.15%); Consumer Discretionary (11.13%); Industrials (10.94%); Technology (10.73%); Utilities (10.49%); Financials (10.41%); Materials (10.04%); Telecom (9.16%).

Standard Deviation of Annual Total Returns (1985-2015): Technology (25.45%); Materials (20.73%); Consumer Discretionary (19.27%); Financials (19.26%); Energy (19.08%); Telecom (18.93%); Industrials (17.72%); Health Care (15.93%); Consumer Staples (14.32%); Utilities (14.02%).

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OF NO PARTY OR CLIQUE

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They say

your operating model should
be an engine for growth

We make

sure it can shift
gears quickly

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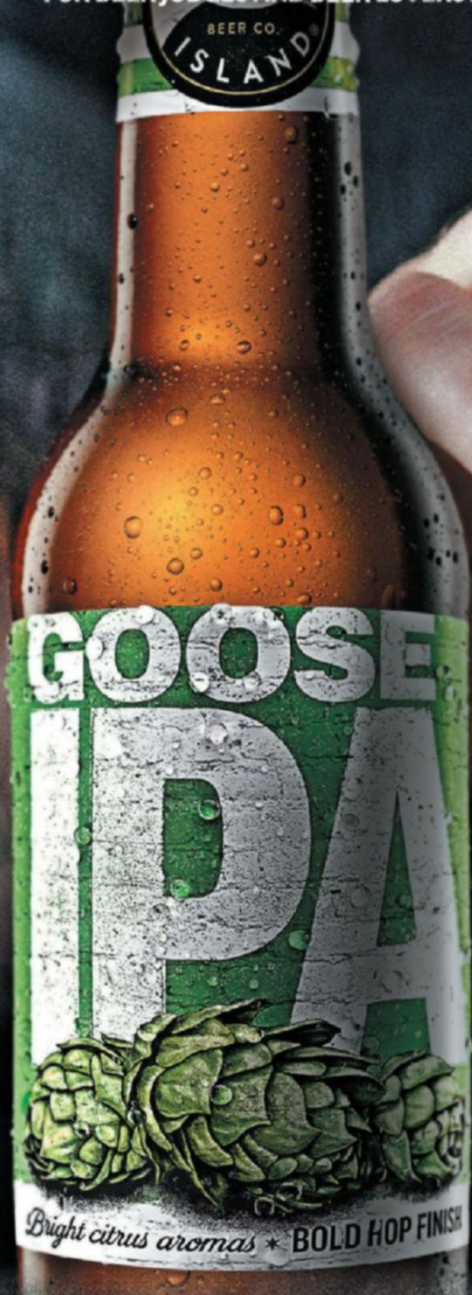


On the Cover

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Phil Toledano

TASTE IS THE TRUE TEST.

BRIGHT CITRUS AROMAS AND A BOLD HOP FINISH MAKE GOOSE IPA THE CHOICE FOR BEER JUDGES AND BEER LOVERS ALIKE. BECAUSE TASTE IS THE TRUE TEST.



TO WHAT'S NEXT. GOOSEISLAND.COM

THE CONVERSATION

RESPONSES & REVERBERATIONS

America's Financial Impotence

In the May cover story, Neal Gabler confessed “My Secret Shame”: He’s among the nearly half of Americans who would have trouble finding \$400 in an emergency.

The author has no reason to feel shame, nor does anyone else who finds themselves in similar circumstances financially. The badge of shame should be worn by the ruling class, whose owners and managers profit greatly from their low-wage workers. Indeed, it takes a large number of working poor to keep one person wealthy. Let’s face it. People are either grossly overpaid and regarded as successful, or grossly underpaid and regarded as lazy or losers. And then there are the financiers who profit from the debt people carry their entire lives, paying out huge sums at usurious interest rates. The system is more rigged than ever, and the new gilded class seems impervious to the price society pays for its extreme wealth.

Kelly Aanrud
AMHERST JUNCTION, WIS.

The Atlantic published this article without addressing the most glaring of Mr. Gabler’s inaccuracies—his declaration

that “the erosion of wages is something over which none of us has any control.”

Let us consider that we live in a representative democracy that has, for decades, consistently voted to curtail the bargaining power of organized labor. It should come as no surprise that the real income of nearly everyone who works for a living has declined with labor’s waning strength. Similarly, Americans have rejected single-payer health care. We have refused to use public funds to make higher education affordable. We live with the results of our votes as well as the results of our personal choices.

Unfortunately, many of us are in very similar situations to Mr. Gabler’s—but let us admit that we are doing this to ourselves as a nation as much as we are doing it to ourselves as individuals.

Paul Grego
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

“Financial impotence is an equal-opportunity malady,

striking across every demographic divide,” writes Neal Gabler ...

It might be true that this can happen to anyone, but for minorities, it’s far, far more likely. It’s also true that in the event of a downturn—personal or marketwide—they fall harder, faster. They have fewer resources for digging themselves out of a hole, and they are unlikely to know anyone who is much better off who could spot them the needed cash ...

Blacks and Hispanics continue to struggle economically. In 2013, the median white household had wealth that totaled more than \$140,000; Hispanics had only about \$14,000. And black Americans had \$11,000 ...

At the start of 2016, the homeownership rate for white Americans was 72 percent. For Hispanics it was 45 percent. For blacks it was 42 percent. Even for those minorities who are able to buy homes, the benefits are more muted than they

are for white Americans. Why? Blacks and Hispanics are more likely to live in low-income neighborhoods, which means that their homes don’t appreciate as much as they would if they were somewhere else. But when these families do move to mostly white neighborhoods, they nevertheless tend to suffer. In fact, research has shown that once more than 10 percent of a neighborhood becomes populated by black residents, property values begin to decline, largely in response to their presence.

A prime example of this inequality is the aftermath of the housing crisis. While whites were more likely to own homes, they were also more likely to own other assets. For black homeowners, however, houses accounted for a larger portion of their wealth. That means the recession gutted much of the black wealth there was.

Gillian B. White
EXCERPT FROM A
THEATLANTIC.COM ARTICLE



Everyone knows that the U.S. middle class is in serious trouble; however, this article does not do the problem justice, because it is mostly about this one author who lives in the Hamptons, has two children, sent them to private schools and to elite schools of higher learning, and paid for his youngest daughter's wedding to the point of using up his retirement savings. He complains about how tight his spending money is, despite the fact that, for the most part, his parents paid for his children's education, and also despite the fact that he is well educated and has a decent income, a good profession, and many awards to his name. He thinks he deserves better.

I would sympathize, except his family is not living the lifestyle of the American middle class. They are living the lifestyle of the rich, and that lifestyle costs a lot of money. Is it any wonder that they are strapped for cash? Compare them with the real middle class, laboring in jobs that are being outsourced abroad or offered to others who will do them for much less. Compare them with those people who cannot afford to send their children to elite schools, so they must aspire only to community colleges or, if they're lucky, to state colleges, the budgets for which are being reduced more and more. Compare them with those families who are either living in very modest homes or unable to even buy a home in the first place.

This article gives the impression that the American middle class is strapped because people cannot live the lifestyle of the rich. Nobody is entitled to that—probably not even the rich. Please, Mr. Gabler, stop whining. You give the middle class a bad name.

Ana Martinez Marshall
BELLEVUE, WASH.

The shame and silence surrounding money in our culture is intense; the need to keep up appearances almost as much so. In addition, the plight of the middle-age journalist is all too real ... But Gabler's particular circumstances demonstrate the blindness to class at the heart of this particular personal-finance genre, even if he protests that he's aware of it. It's one thing to be broke; it's another to be broke while apparently writing from a home

that could probably sell for six figures.

Helaine Olen

EXCERPT FROM A SLATE ARTICLE

Though my 2015 tax returns record my income as about \$24,000, I do not find myself in Gabler's predicament; I could easily come up with \$400 for an emergency. I attribute this to my consumption habits and lifestyle choices. My needs are simple and my tolerance for a lack of luxury high, so my monthly and annual expenses are quite low—as is my carbon footprint (the less one consumes, the smaller the footprint).

As a Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal for two years, I lived a very simple lifestyle: I carried my water from the spring; I cooked my food over a wood fire on a clay stove that I'd built myself; I had no electricity or plumbing; and, of course, I walked everywhere.

I believe that we Americans could all live on less—much less. When I look around my town, I see new SUVs *everywhere*! I don't know what they cost, because I drive a 20-year-old VW diesel that I own outright, but I imagine that both the payments to the bank and the comprehensive insurance coverage—as well as expensive repairs—would break my bank account.

My dad once told me that when he's about to buy something, he says to himself: *Do I want it? Yes. Do I need it? No.* And then he leaves the store without it. If we all asked

ourselves that question, more of us might be able to come up with \$400.

Scott Durkee

VASHON ISLAND, WASH.

Americans' love for consumption overwhelms any fear of financial insecurity and its attendant risks.

I was raised by parents who lived through the Depression, the First World War, and the Second World War. I developed a deep understanding that I had to work hard and save money for difficult times. I also developed an appreciation for the joy that one gets from those things in life that are not expensive but are deeply gratifying, such as a good book or a warm conversation with a good friend.

So here I am, 67 years old, married, with two boys who from the get-go knew they had to work and be financially self-sustaining (I always told them that they could come home to live with us at any time—as long as they had a job). They seem to be happy and well adjusted. And I don't worry about finances, because I worked hard and saved money.

John Allen

SHARON, CONN.

The primary reason people have so much trouble saving is that they can always find a reason to justify not doing so. The details of what they're spending on may change, but the justifications have a curiously similar sound to them ...

Frequently ... that reason is (a) all I want is

THE BIG QUESTION

On *TheAtlantic.com*, readers answered June's Big Question and voted on one another's responses. Here are the top vote-getters.

Q: What is history's most influential feud?

5. The feud between Imam Ali and the Prophet Muhammad's other companions, which led to the current division between Shia and Sunni Muslims.

— Lama Hassoun Ayoub

4. The Neanderthals and the *Homo sapiens* some 40,000 years ago.

— Patrick Driscoll

3. Between spirit and

matter, as in Plato.

— Donald Wigal

2. The conflict between Islam and Western civilization.

— Holmes Brannon

1. The one that began in 1945, after the death of FDR, between **the United States and the Soviet Union**, which continues today between the U.S. and Russia.

— Jeff Brown

the bare-minimum decent life enjoyed by every other member of my social class and (b) children. The former justification is exacerbated by the fact that we are so furtive and shame-ridden about our finances, so people often don't realize how often our neighbors' "bare-minimum decent life" is hired on credit. The latter is exacerbated by the fact that it's hard not to want to give the best to your kids ...

People are locked in a status arms race that somehow often comes to focus on the happiness or safety of their kids.

I'm not deriding those folks, only pointing out the behavior. Because the only people who can stop the self-bankrupting arms race

are the people participating in it. And the only way they can do so is to start deliberately sitting out the competition. Untold generations of human beings have lived to adulthood without the blessings of a brand-new minivan, a travel-soccer trophy, or a Harvard education. Modern children raised without them will probably also be fine.

Unfortunately, I'm not sure how much good it does to point this out. The truth is that your kids will care about how nice your car is, about whether they can be on travel hockey with their friends, about whether they can go to fancy schools like their friends. And if you were raised in a social class that regards any of these things as the basics

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of a decent life, you will feel horrible about denying them. It's the mother of all collective-action problems: If all the parents agreed at once to stop this mad arms race, everyone could breathe easy and have a more secure life. But as long as some of the parents provide those things, everyone else's kids will want them too ... and their parents will long to deliver.

Megan McArdle

EXCERPT FROM A
BLOOMBERG VIEW ARTICLE

It's all too clear why parents will spend their last dollar (and their last borrowed dollar) on their kids' education: In a society with dramatic income inequality and dramatic educational inequality, the cost of missing out on the best society has to offer (or, really, at the individual scale, the best any person can afford) is unfathomable. So parents spend at the brink of what they can afford. By contrast, nonparents are far more likely to actually build up savings ...

Gabler writes, "We resolved to sacrifice our own comforts to give our daughters theirs." Considering the stakes, this is not a mistake (despite what many commenters have insisted) but a rational response to the unequal distribution of America's good schools and its prosperity more generally. And there's reason to think this may yet pay off for Gabler. True, he has no savings. True, he lives very meagerly. But he has two very well-educated and successful daughters. They are, in a sense, his retirement plan: Most likely, they will be in a position to care for him and his wife in their later years. We should all be so lucky.

Rebecca J. Rosen

EXCERPT FROM A
THEATLANTIC.COM ARTICLE

Correction

June's "Cover to Cover" review of Olja Savičević's *Adios, Cowboy* misidentified the book's publisher. McSweeney's published the book.

To contribute to The Conversation, please e-mail letters@theatlantic.com. Include your full name, city, and state.

A WATERSHED FOR WATERSHEDS.

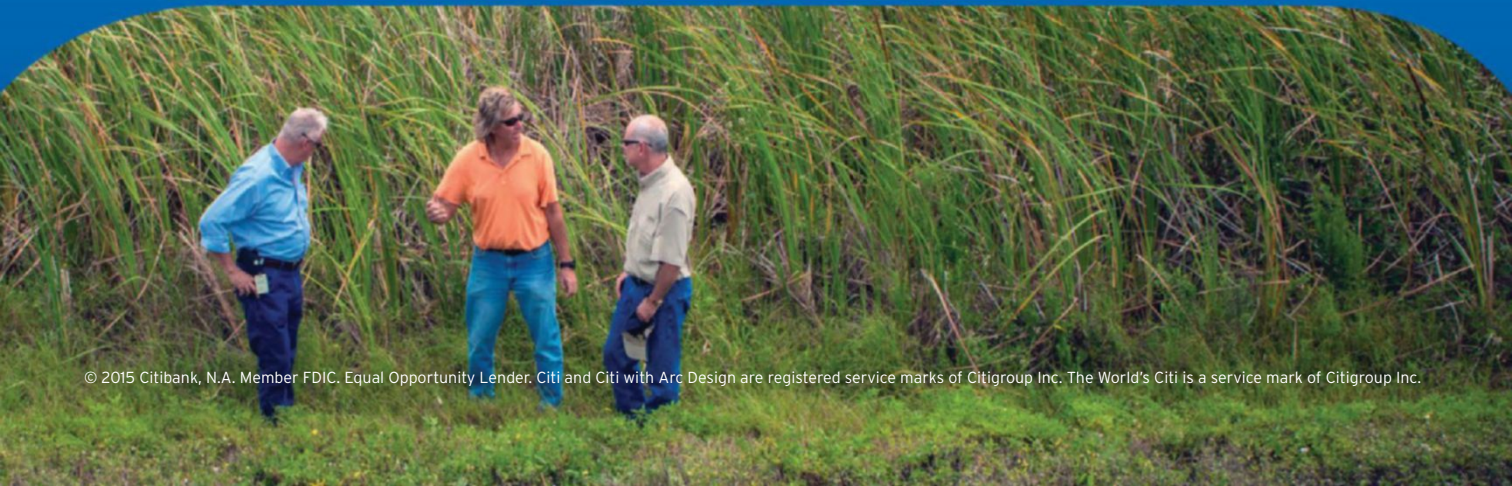


Half of the Everglades has already disappeared. Now the remaining half of this fragile ecosystem is at risk from pollutants in stormwater runoff.

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July/August 2016

*“In the midst
of the Battle of
McDowell, [Stonewall
Jackson] was
discovered napping.”
— Mary Roach,
p. 30*

The War on Stupid People

BY DAVID H. FREEDMAN

A white paper airplane is shown in flight against a solid blue background. The paper is folded into a classic airplane shape with a pointed nose and swept-back wings. On the surface of the paper, there is printed mathematical text. Visible text includes: "Express, $\lim_{x \rightarrow 0} \left(\frac{\sin x}{x} \right)$ ", "For what value of", "simplest form", "function:", " $f(x) = \begin{cases} \frac{1-\cos x}{x^2} & x \neq 0 \\ k & x = 0 \end{cases}$ ", "continuous at $x = 0$ ", "the properties of", " $y = (x^2 - 1)^2$ ", and " $x = 0$ ". A prominent red circle with a diagonal slash (a 'no' or 'prohibited' symbol) is drawn over the text. The airplane is casting a soft shadow on the blue surface below it.

This gleeful derision seems especially cruel in view of the more serious abuse that modern life has heaped upon the less intellectually gifted. Few will be surprised to hear that, according to the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, a long-running federal study, IQ correlates with chances of landing a financially rewarding job. Other analyses suggest that each IQ

point is worth hundreds of dollars in annual income—surely a painful formula for the 80 million Americans with an IQ of 90 or below. When the less smart are identified by lack of educational achievement (which in contemporary America is closely correlated with lower IQ), the contrast only sharpens. From 1979 to 2012, the median-income gap between a family headed by two earners with college degrees and two earners with high-school degrees grew by \$30,000, in constant dollars. Studies have furthermore found that, compared with the intelligent, less intelligent people are more likely to suffer from some types of mental illness, become obese, develop heart disease, experience permanent brain damage from a traumatic injury, and end up in prison, where they are more likely than other inmates to be drawn to violence. They're also likely to die sooner.

Rather than looking for ways to give the less intelligent a break, the successful and influential seem more determined than ever to freeze them out. The employment Web site Monster captures current hiring wisdom in its advice to managers, suggesting they look for candidates who, of course, “work hard” and are “ambitious” and “nice”—but who, first and foremost, are “smart.” To make sure they end up with such people, more and more companies are testing applicants on a range of skills, judgment, and knowledge. CEB, one of the world's largest providers of hiring assessments, evaluates more than 40 million job applicants each year. The number of new hires who report having been tested nearly doubled from 2008 to 2013, says CEB. To be sure, many of these tests scrutinize personality and skills, rather than intelligence. But intelligence and cognitive-skills tests are popular and growing more so. In addition, many employers now ask applicants for SAT scores (whose correlation with IQ is well established); some companies screen out those whose scores don't fall in the

top 5 percent. Even the NFL gives potential draftees a test, the Wonderlic.

Yes, some careers do require smarts. But even as high intelligence is increasingly treated as a job prerequisite, evidence suggests that it is not the unalloyed advantage it's assumed to be. The late Harvard Business School professor Chris Argyris argued that smart people can make the worst employees, in part because they're not used to dealing with failure or criticism. Multiple studies have concluded that interpersonal skills,

self-awareness, and other “emotional” qualities can be better predictors of strong job performance than conventional intelligence, and the College Board itself points out that it has never claimed SAT scores are helpful hiring filters. (As for the NFL, some of its most successful quarterbacks have been strikingly low

scorers on the Wonderlic, including Hall of Famers Terry Bradshaw, Dan Marino, and Jim Kelly.) Moreover, many jobs that have come to require college degrees, ranging from retail manager to administrative assistant, haven't generally gotten harder for the less educated to perform.

At the same time, those positions that can still be acquired without a college degree are disappearing. The list of manufacturing and low-level service jobs that have been taken over, or nearly so, by robots, online services, apps, kiosks, and other forms of automation grows longer daily. Among the many types of workers for whom the bell may soon toll: anyone who drives people or things around for a living, thanks to the driverless cars in the works at (for example) Google and the delivery drones undergoing testing at (for example) Amazon, as well as driverless trucks now being tested on the roads; and most people who work in restaurants, thanks to increasingly affordable and people-friendly robots made by companies like Momentum Machines, and to a growing number of apps that let you arrange for a table, place an order, and pay—all without help from a human being. These two

examples together comprise jobs held by an estimated 15 million Americans.

Meanwhile, our fetishization of IQ now extends far beyond the workplace. Intelligence and academic achievement have steadily been moving up on rankings of traits desired in a mate; researchers at the University of Iowa report that intelligence now rates above domestic skills, financial success, looks, sociability, and health.

The most popular comedy on television is *The Big Bang Theory*, which follows a small gang of young scientists. *Scorpion*, which features a team of geniuses-turned-antiterrorists, is one of CBS's top-rated shows. The genius detective Sherlock Holmes has two TV series and a blockbuster movie franchise featuring one of Hollywood's most bankable stars. “Every society through history has picked some trait that magnifies success for some,” says Robert Sternberg, a professor of human development at Cornell University and an expert on assessing students' traits. “We've picked academic skills.”

WHAT DO WE MEAN by *intelligence*? We devote copious energy to cataloging the wonderfully different forms it might take—interpersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, and so forth—ultimately leaving virtually no one “unintelligent.” But many of these forms won't raise SAT scores or grades, and so probably won't result in a good job. Instead of bending over backwards to find ways of discussing intelligence that won't leave anyone out, it might make more sense to acknowledge that most people don't possess enough of the version that's required to thrive in today's world.

A few numbers help clarify the nature and scope of the problem. The College Board has suggested a “college readiness benchmark” that works out to roughly 500 on each portion of the SAT as a score below which students are not likely to achieve at least a B-minus average at “a four-year college”—presumably an average one. (By comparison, at Ohio State University, a considerably better-than-average school ranked 52nd among

When the term meritocracy appeared in 1958, it was in a dystopian satire.

U.S. universities by *U.S. News & World Report*, freshmen entering in 2014 averaged 605 on the reading section of the SAT and 668 on the math section.)

How many high-school students are capable of meeting the College Board benchmark? This is not easy to answer, because in most states, large numbers of students never take a college-entrance exam (in California, for example, at most 43 percent of high-school students sit for the SAT or the ACT). To get a general sense, though, we can look to Delaware, Idaho, Maine, and the District of Columbia, which provide the SAT for free and have SAT participation rates above 90 percent, according to *The Washington Post*. In these states in 2015, the percentage of students averaging at least 500 on the reading section ranged from 33 percent (in D.C.) to 40 percent (in Maine), with similar distributions scoring 500 or more on the math and writing sections. Considering that these data don't include dropouts, it seems safe to say that no more than one in three American high-school students is capable of hitting the College Board's benchmark. Quibble with the details all you want, but there's no escaping the conclusion that most Americans aren't smart enough to do something we are told is an essential step toward succeeding in our new, brain-centric economy—namely, get through four years of college with moderately good grades.

Many people who have benefited from the current system like to tell themselves that they're working hard to help the unintelligent become intelligent. This is a marvelous goal, and decades of research have shown that it's achievable through two approaches: dramatically reducing poverty, and getting young children who are at risk of poor academic performance into intensive early-education programs. The strength of the link between poverty and struggling in school is as close to ironclad as social science gets. Still, there's little point in discussing alleviating poverty as a solution,

because our government and society are not seriously considering any initiatives capable of making a significant dent in the numbers or conditions of the poor.

That leaves us with early education, which, when done right—and for poor children, it rarely is—seems to largely overcome whatever cognitive and emotional deficits poverty and other environmental circumstances impart in the first years of life. As instantiated most famously by the Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in the 1960s; more recently by the Educare program



in Chicago; and by dozens of experimental programs in between, early education done right means beginning at the age of 3 or earlier, with teachers who are well trained in the particular demands of early education. These high-quality programs have been closely studied, some for decades. And while the results haven't proved that students get a lasting IQ boost in the absence of enriched education in the years after preschool, measures of virtually every desirable outcome typically correlated with high IQ remain elevated for years and even decades—including better school grades,

higher achievement-test scores, higher income, crime avoidance, and better health. Unfortunately, Head Start and other public early-education programs rarely come close to this level of quality, and are nowhere near universal.

In lieu of excellent early education, we have embraced a more familiar strategy for closing the intelligence gap. Namely, we invest our tax money and faith in reforming primary and secondary schools, which receive some \$607 billion in federal, state, and local revenues each year. But these efforts are

too little, too late: If the cognitive and emotional deficits associated with poor school performance aren't addressed in the earliest years of life, future efforts aren't likely to succeed.

Confronted with evidence that our approach is failing—high-school seniors reading at the fifth-grade level, abysmal international rankings—we comfort ourselves with the idea that we're taking steps to locate those underprivileged kids who are, against the odds, extremely intelligent. Finding this tiny minority of gifted poor children and providing them with exceptional educational opportunities allows us to conjure the evening-news-friendly fiction of an equal-opportunity system, as if the problematically ungifted majority were not as deserving of attention as the “overlooked gems.” Press coverage decries the gap in Advanced Placement courses at poor schools, as if their real problem was a dearth of college-level physics or Mandarin.

Even if we refuse to prevent poverty or provide superb early education, we might consider one other means of addressing the average person's plight. Some of the money pouring into educational reform might be diverted to creating more top-notch vocational-education programs (today called career and technical education, or CTE). Right now only one in 20 U.S. public high schools is a full-time CTE school. And these schools are increasingly oversubscribed. Consider

Chicago's Prosser Career Academy, which has an acclaimed CTE program. Although 2,000 students apply to the school annually, the CTE program has room for fewer than 350. The applicant pool is winnowed down through a lottery, but academic test scores play a role, too. Worse, many CTE schools are increasingly emphasizing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, at risk of undercutting their ability to aid students who struggle academically—rather than those who want to burnish their already excellent college and career prospects. It would be far better to maintain a focus on food management, office administration, health technology, and, sure, the classic trades—all updated to incorporate computerized tools.

We must stop glorifying intelligence and treating our society as a playground for the smart minority. We should

instead begin shaping our economy, our schools, even our culture with an eye to the abilities and needs of the majority, and to the full range of human capacity. The government could, for example, provide incentives to companies that resist automation, thereby preserving jobs for the less brainy. It could also discourage hiring practices that arbitrarily and counterproductively weed out the less-well-IQ'ed. This might even rebound to employers' benefit: Whatever advantages high intelligence confers on employees, it doesn't necessarily make for more effective, *better* employees. Among other things, the less brainy are, according to studies and some business experts, less likely to be oblivious of their own biases and flaws, to mistakenly assume that recent trends will continue into the future, to be anxiety-ridden, and to be arrogant.

When Michael Young, a British sociologist, coined the term *meritocracy* in 1958, it was in a dystopian satire. At the time, the world he imagined, in which intelligence fully determined who thrived and who languished, was understood to be predatory, pathological, far-fetched. Today, however, we've almost finished installing such a system, and we have embraced the idea of a meritocracy with few reservations, even treating it as virtuous. That can't be right. Smart people should feel entitled to make the most of their gift. But they should not be permitted to reshape society so as to instate giftedness as a universal yardstick of human worth. **A**

David H. Freedman is an Atlantic contributing editor and the author of Wrong: Why Experts Keep Failing Us—And How to Know When Not to Trust Them.

BIG IN ... VENEZUELA

ROLEX REVOLUTIONARIES

BEFORE ITS now 15-year-old dalliance with leftist Bolivarianism, oil-rich Venezuela was a country of beauty queens and luxury brands. But for those who have benefited from the country's political revolution, flaunting wealth is now complicated. The bespoke suits and designer purses favored by elites in other countries clash with the ruling regime's socialist ideals. Instead, Venezuelan officials tend to limit their public attire to the red shirts, military uniforms, and Venezuelan-flag-themed tracksuits favored by the late President Hugo Chávez.

Or so it might at first appear. In fact, many elite Chavistas have taken to pairing these staid outfits with luxury watches. An extravagant timepiece apparently offers a means of differentiating oneself from the revolutionary pack, without attracting public scrutiny. Through years of scarcity, most Venezuelans have been too busy lining up for toilet paper and milk and bartering for medications to pay much attention to wristwear, let alone to distinguish between a Timex and a Rolex.

This is where the Venezuelan blog "Relojos del Chavismo" comes in. Published anonymously,

it launched during a rash of antigovernment protests in early 2014. Its mission: to identify the brands and prices of the watches (*relojes*) favored by the country's revolutionary leaders—such as the IWC Pilot's Watch Chronograph Top Gun Miramar worn by the defense minister, and the president of a state-television channel's Rolex Yacht-Master. At the current monthly minimum wage, it would take a Venezuelan worker nearly 80 years to earn the \$12,600 required to buy a Yacht-Master—and that's without taking into account the world's highest inflation rate.

Venezuelan officials may be long on timepieces, but as their country teeters on the brink of social and economic collapse, they appear increasingly short on time.

— *Daniel Lansberg-Rodríguez*



VLADIMIR PADRINO LÓPEZ
Minister of defense



IWC Pilot's Watch Chronograph Top Gun Miramar
\$11,900



WINSTON VALLENILLA
President of a state-TV channel



Rolex Yacht-Master
\$12,600



JACQUELINE FARIA
Chief of the Socialist Party of Caracas



Jaeger-LeCoultre Master Compressor
\$7,550

Sources: "Relojos del Chavismo"; manufacturers' suggested retail prices. (Note: Some models have been discontinued.)



ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARCO GORAN ROMANO

Whether its public, private, or hybrid, cloud structure can keep a bank's costs low, operations solid and efficient, and customers in the loop.

CLOUD-INVESTED FUTURE

SMART, CONNECTED, CUSTOMER-CENTRIC BANKING

The cloud is the ubiquitous backbone of both fledgling startups and billion-dollar empires. Log in on social media, send an email, pay a friend with a text: You're cloud hopping. Every type—public, private, or hybrid—of cloud structure allows companies to reduce staffing and infrastructure costs while improving organizational agility. The same can now be said for the banking industry.

CLOUD-DRIVEN As it has continued to grow more secure, the cloud is increasingly popular with financial institutions looking to improve their agility, productivity, or connectivity with customers. For example, the first new High Street bank to open in the United Kingdom in more than a century did so thanks to the cloud's ability to keep costs low, scalability high, and customers happy.

CLOUD BENEFITS In an industry where milliseconds can translate into millions of dollars, banks have turned to cloud technology to streamline all their processes. And with hybrid clouds that balance the need for on-premises control with the flexibility of on-demand cloud services, providers can serve different banks according to their unique needs.

The question is no longer whether banks and capital markets should use the cloud or not but rather how best to take advantage of the service.

**\$109
BILLION**

Potential annual savings from switching the world's 1.2 billion deposit accounts to the cloud

**60
PERCENT**

Percentage of banks that will process the majority of their transactions in the cloud this year

**42
PERCENT**

Percentage of financial-services IT decision-makers who think cloud services are critical to the viability of their businesses

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• SKETCH

The Good Daughter

Why Chelsea Clinton never quite stands alone

BY MICHELLE COTTLE

IT'S HER FIRST EVENT of the day—and not yet 11 in the morning—but already Chelsea Clinton looks tired: There's a puffiness under her blue eyes and a heaviness to her smile. Taking the stage at the Hillary for America headquarters in Milwaukee, she grabs a stool. "Please know I'm sitting because I'm pregnant," she assures the roomful of supporters, stroking her swollen belly. "It is not at all a reflection on my gratitude for you

all being here or my enthusiasm for my mom's campaign."

Wisconsin's April 5 primary is less than two weeks away, and for the next 20 minutes, Chelsea makes a case for why her mom is the most qualified candidate—the only candidate, really—for the job of president. She speaks slowly and deliberately, her voice low and modulated. After weeks of hard campaigning, she has grown slightly hoarse. But otherwise there are no rough

edges to her. No seams. No rambling or verbal filler. Like Hillary, Chelsea is neither an inspirational nor a motivational speaker. But her soothing aspect is strangely compelling, like that of a meditation guide or a priest.

After her remarks, Chelsea makes her way to a side room where a gaggle of reporters hovers. This is the campaign chore she has always liked least, having long had an uneasy relationship with the media. In this way, too, she is very much

her mother's child. Methodical, deliberate, cautious, detail-oriented, and disciplined, she tries to keep an iron grip on her own narrative. Journalists pose a constant threat to that control.

Media access to Chelsea's inner circle is meticulously managed. Asked even the most basic questions, her friends and colleagues tread cautiously. At times, their stories sound eerily similar, right down to the phrasing. (Chelsea is so caring and devoted, two different women told me, that she makes you wonder whether you are, perhaps, her only friend.) No one talks out of school, in some cases because they're loyal, in others because they fear being cast into the wilderness by the entire clan—which, as more than one person reminded me, includes the woman who may well be the next president of the United States.

The Milwaukee reporters lob questions of the sort that Chelsea encounters dozens of times a week—about Bernie Sanders, for example, and Latino voters. Then one intrepid young man tries a different approach. Noting that if Hillary is elected, the nation will have a first gentleman rather than a first lady, he asks, “Do you think your mother will have you as a stand-in hostess in that position?”

It's an odd question, and Chelsea is clearly itching to smack it down. She has a job in New York, she reminds him, and a family of her own. (Maybe the guy missed all the tummy patting?) At a previous campaign stop, she says, someone asked whether she planned to move back into her old room in the East Wing. Chelsea seems both amused and exasperated by the notion. While she hopes to have the privilege of visiting her mother in the White House, she explains, that is as far as she intends to go. “My life,” she says, “will remain in New York.”

Such is the paradox of being Chelsea Clinton. The once and possibly future first daughter has always been mature and accomplished beyond her years.

Now 36, she has a child at home and another on the way, three advanced degrees, one book to her name, and a second coming next year. She plays a high-profile role as vice chair of the family's global philanthropic foundation. On the side, she teaches, writes, gives speeches, and sits on corporate and nonprofit boards.

Yet Chelsea remains in the public mind an appendage of her world-famous parents, always available to fulfill her duties as the consummate political daughter. It's as if she's still the curly-haired teenager who walked hand in hand with her mom and dad across the White House lawn, literally and figuratively holding the family together, after Bill's televised admission of bad behavior with Monica Lewinsky.

Chelsea was 18 years old and a freshman at Stanford when the scandal engulfed her father's presidency. The photos from the day after his mea culpa,

August 18, 1998, are by far the most famous ever taken of her. No longer the gawky adolescent target of *Saturday Night Live* jokes but not yet her polished-to-perfection adult self, she radiated both stability and vulnerability.

This was the sort of crisis Bill and Hillary had been girding their daughter for from the start. One of the oft-told tales from Chelsea's youth is how, at age 6,

she took part in mock debates that her parents held around the kitchen table in preparation for her dad's 1986 gubernatorial race. The goal was to get little Chelsea accustomed to people saying mean things about someone she loved. Over the course of a number of dinners, Hillary wrote in *It Takes a Village*, “she gradually gained mastery over her emotions.”

In a way typically reserved for political wives, Chelsea became a barometer for how worthy her fallen father was of forgiveness. She was confused and wounded and crushingly disappointed in him. But she knew what was expected of her: Control your emotions. Keep moving forward. She stood by her father

and eventually forgave him, leaving the president so grateful, according to Clinton insiders, that he will spend the rest of his life making it up to her.

CHELSEA IS DEEP into her second Wisconsin rally, this one with several dozen supporters crammed into the sweltering offices of the Waukesha County Democratic Party, when a woman a few yards from the stage starts yelling, “Call 911!” The elderly gentleman next to her has gone pale and glassy-eyed and looks as though he is about to hit the floor—which he soon does. Low-grade bedlam erupts as people try to decide whether to move in and help or give the poor guy some air. Eventually, it is determined that he is suffering from heatstroke, and Chelsea assures the audience that all will be well. The man is moved to a cooler room.

Chelsea announces that she will have to come back another time for a Q&A, then wades into the crowd for hugs and selfies, many with supporters who have no clue how to take one. A short, beefy guy wearing a tight red T-shirt proclaiming him HOT FOR HILLARY snuggles close for a photo. “That is one of my favorite T-shirts ever!” Chelsea says. Through it all—the heat, the medical drama, the endless nodding and smiling and posing—her composure never falters.

Poised. This is the word used to describe Chelsea more often than any other. Friends praise her as thoughtful, genuine, gracious, hardworking, brilliant, passionate about her causes, and, as is *de rigueur* for famous people one is aiming to humanize, down-to-earth. But almost everyone at some point goes with *poised*, making her sound a bit like a beauty queen or a diplomat or the ballerina she was in her youth. Or maybe a politician.

Poised captures Chelsea's persona in more than one way. Over the years, she has been repeatedly painted as being on the cusp of emerging from her parents' shadow. Each time she begins a new venture—going off to Stanford, taking a job at NBC, joining the paid-speaking circuit—stories appear declaring it the moment Chelsea has at last come into

Time and again, she gets drawn back in, called to be her father's right hand or her mother's character witness.

her own. Which, each time, is both partly true and partly a feat that continues to elude her. Time and again she gets drawn back into her parents' orbit, called to be her father's right hand or her mother's chief character witness.

Chelsea's time at Stanford provided distance not only from her mom and dad but also from the whole political world. By her final year, however, she had enough credits to take several months off. And just like that, she slid back into the role of full-time first daughter. She alternated between helping with her mom's Senate race and serving as *de facto* first lady for her father—traveling with him, attending state functions, and generally filling in while Hillary was on the campaign trail. (During the Middle East peace talks at Camp David, Chelsea was there to chat up the delegations during breaks.)

After college, she headed to Oxford for graduate school and then went to work in the private sector—first as a consultant at McKinsey, then as a chemical-industry analyst on Wall Street. She has characterized these moves as an experiment to see whether she could care about priorities different from her parents'. They also allowed her to largely drop off the media's radar.

But her mother's 2008 presidential campaign prompted what turned out to be a defining choice, to publicly embrace the family brand. No question her mom needed her. There's no one better suited to counter Hillary's likability problem, to assure voters of the candidate's softer, more relatable, more human side. Considering how close the two women are, Clinton insiders say, Chelsea's decision was never in doubt.

Over the next few years, Chelsea continued her questing—picking up a second master's degree and a doctorate, teaching at Columbia, launching a multifaith institute at NYU, even joining the ranks of the dreaded media—while becoming ever more immersed in her dad's foundation, which in 2013 was renamed the Bill, Hillary & Chelsea Clinton Foundation.

And so here she is, barnstorming the country for her mom once more, this



In the most-famous photos ever taken of her, Chelsea Clinton was seen as holding her family together during the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

time while extremely pregnant and with a toddler back home in New York. “My travel schedule is more like a yo-yo this time,” she tells me after the Waukesha event. In 2008, she would hit the road for weeks at a time. “My schedule could follow the geography of primaries.” Now, she says, “my most important geography is being home with my daughter. So I try to never be gone for more than about three days at a time.” Being the perfect political daughter, it seems, only grows more complicated with age.

MORE THAN ONCE, Chelsea has publicly expressed how “frustrating” it was for her to set out to blaze her own trail only to wind up following her parents down theirs. But to what extent this is the product of their neediness or hers is unclear, perhaps even to the Clintons.

It wasn't just family loyalty that brought her back into the fold, after all. Being the “daughter of” comes with enormous perks. Chelsea may be smart and diligent, but that's not the only reason she got a post at NYU or a \$600,000-a-year gig at NBC. And, for

Chelsea, the lure of operating on the world stage proved irresistible. “When you've seen the positive impact that can come from a life of public service and the kind of difference you can make on a large scale, it's hard to move away from that,” Sara Auld, a friend of Chelsea's from Stanford, told me.

Having abandoned the idea of forging a wholly independent path—becoming, say, the doctor she once planned to be—Chelsea has settled into a kind of limbo: pursuing projects of her own, even as the Clinton brand smooths the way, and maintaining a wide buffer of privacy while enjoying the influence and access her fame confers.

But having it both ways will get trickier if her mother wins in November. Every move she makes will face heightened scrutiny by her family's political enemies and a media less inclined to keep their distance now that she is closer to 40 than 14.

Already, she has taken a few hits. At a January campaign stop, Chelsea accused Bernie Sanders of wanting to dismantle existing health-insurance programs. While technically true (Sanders

The Science of Beer Goggles

Alcohol makes us impulsive, vain, and uncharitable—and it just might help us stay married.

BY STEPHANIE HAYES

supports a single-payer plan) and hardly unusual for campaign rhetoric, the attack was jeered by Democrats and Republicans alike as misleading. Pundits gave her a rare wallop, and the veteran media critic Jack Shafer lectured the entire Fourth Estate to stop treating her like a fragile flower in an article whose headline proclaimed, “Time for Chelsea Clinton’s Easy Ride to End.”

The Sanders tempest sparked more than just PR static. The conservative group Citizens United (an enduring Hillary antagonist) promptly sued to get hold of e-mails sent between Chelsea and her mom’s top aides while Hillary was secretary of state. Citizens United is searching for inappropriate links between the Clinton Foundation and the State Department during Hillary’s tenure. The group’s president, David Bossie, declared, “We want to see much more about what Chelsea Clinton was up to.”

ELSA COLLINS, another friend from Stanford, told me she has a fond memory of talking with President Clinton at Chelsea’s wedding, in which she served as a bridesmaid. “I asked her dad, ‘Do you have any good parenting tips?’” she said. “Her father said that he used to do this thing with Chelsea where they would start a story. She would write down the first paragraph of a fantasy story. If he was out of town traveling, he would come back from a trip, and he would write the second paragraph. She would write the third, and they would take turns going back and forth.” In the end, they would wind up with “a great story that they would read together.”

Collins offers this as an illustration of Bill and Hillary’s desire to “engage” with their young daughter while still “respecting her childhood.” It’s also a fitting metaphor for what it’s like to be Chelsea Clinton: to have parents who love and nurture you, who help you develop your talents and urge you to be the best you can be—but who loom so large that it remains impossible for you to write a story of your own. **A**

Michelle Cottle is a contributing editor at The Atlantic.

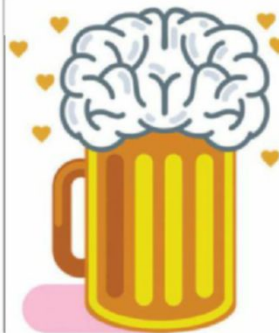
A COUPLE OF scientists walked into a bar and ... began posing moral quandaries. When they presented bar-goers with a version of the classic “trolley problem”—would you push a man in front of a train, killing him in order to save five track workers?—they found that the drunker people got, the more likely they were to say they’d push the man. **[1]** Alcohol, the researchers observed, can make us more utilitarian in our reasoning.

It can also make us less charitable. In one study, researchers offered people 20 euros and gave them a chance to donate some or all of the money to Doctors Without Borders. Compared with sober subjects, those who’d downed an alcoholic peach drink were significantly less likely to donate. **[2]**

But as anyone who’s slurringly professed his affection for another knows, we’re not always heartless when under the influence. Indeed, one study found that alcohol alters the “bystander effect,” whereby people are more reluctant to

help a person in need if others are present. When an experimenter dropped a jar of items in front of several people, those who’d been drinking were quicker to offer aid than those who were sober. The study’s authors suggested that this might be because alcohol lessens social inhibitions. **[3]**

It inflates egos, too. In one experiment, the drunker bar patrons were, the more attractive they considered themselves. **[4]** And the mere belief that we’ve been drinking can be enough to cause this ego boost: People who were told they’d consumed an alcoholic drink considered themselves more attractive, bright, original, and funny than did those who thought they’d had a nonalcoholic drink—whether or not either



drink was actually alcoholic. Another experiment found that sober people find us more appealing when we’re a bit buzzed: Individuals who’d consumed the equivalent of a large glass of wine were deemed more attractive than sober people. (The effect evaporated when people consumed more than one drink.) **[5]**

Our appreciation for others also increases after a drink or two. Participants in one study who imbibed a fruity vodka drink found minimally to moderately attractive faces significantly more beautiful than did those who’d consumed an alcohol-free drink. **[6]** This might be because we’re less able to distinguish symmetrical faces from asymmetrical ones when we’ve been drinking. **[7]** and symmetry is known to be an important component of attractiveness.

Humans aren’t alone in becoming less discriminating after drinking—fruit flies that have been chronically exposed to alcohol are more impulsive about mate selection when under the influence. **[8]** As animal as this tendency is, it may not be a problem so long as we keep sipping. One forthcoming study found that unhappy couples got along better and were more able to solve conflicts after a few vodka-cranberry drinks. **[9]** Which is to say, alcohol might help you not just find a mate, but keep one. **A**

THE STUDIES:

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2. Corazzini et al., “Economic Behavior Under the Influence of Alcohol” (*PLOS One*, April 2015)
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- Psychology, Feb. 2016)
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THE BIG DIFFERENCE SMALL BUSINESS CAN MAKE

FOR ANYONE AIMING TO START OR EXPAND a small business, one critical necessity trumps all the rest: the need for capital. And for people of color, that need has grown more acute. Data shows that, during the economic expansion of 2002-2007, the Small Business Administration (SBA) increased its loans to African-American-run businesses by 60 percent, four times the rate of increase to Caucasian-owned firms. But after 2008, when the black community lost half its total wealth, SBA loans to African-American-run firms dropped by almost half, even as the SBA's total loan volume increased by 25 percent.

Beyond the crucial issue of equal opportunity, there are important economic reasons to work against that disparity. Small businesses create about two-thirds of all new jobs in the private sector, and many of those jobs are in businesses with fewer than five employees, such as local dry cleaners, hairdressers, shoe stores, and diners. These so-called "micro businesses" carry outsized economic weight. If a third of them hired a single person, according to the Association for Enterprise Opportunity, there would be full employment in the United States.

That's why "micro loans" to aspiring small-business entrepreneurs who don't yet qualify for traditional bank loans have economic and social impact far beyond their face value.

Access to capital is especially crucial for businesses in distressed communities, where the need for jobs is greatest and conventional small-business loans can be hardest to get. To meet that challenge, JPMorgan Chase & Co. supports community development financial institutions (CDFIs), non-profit sources of financing for businesses that don't qualify for traditional funding. CDFIs also offer hands-on help with business plans, marketing, financial management, and other "back-office" disciplines required for success. As Janis Bowdler, head of small business initiatives for JPMorgan Chase, puts in their latest Corporate Responsibility Report, CDFIs are "basically an on-ramp that enable entrepreneurs to turn their business idea into a reality."

Small business is a driving economic force both at home and abroad. JPMorgan Chase is empowering independent entrepreneurs around the globe with Small Business Forward, a five-year, \$30-million global initiative that addresses access to flexible capital and targeted technical assistance.

Michael Elliot is one of the entrepreneurs whose business was made possible by financing from a CDFI. Read his story, and more like it, at WWW.THEATLANTIC.COM/CITY-MAKERS



A photograph of Michael Elliot, a Black man with a beard and glasses, wearing a dark blue button-down shirt and jeans. He is sitting on a black leather chair with his hands clasped in front of him. The background is a workshop or studio with a large abstract painting on the wall and a black leather sofa to the right.

Michael Elliot, Founder and CEO of Hammer & Nails Salon Group

Before Michael Elliot became the president of a national company, he just wanted a manicure.

He was soon pitching his idea—a nail salon for men—to investors and local banks in Los Angeles. He didn't qualify for traditional loans, but someone mentioned the Valley Economic Development Center (VEDC), a CDFI with funding specifically for African-American entrepreneurs.

The same year, with VEDC's help, Elliot opened Hammer & Nails, a salon that not only offers nail treatments for men, but also offers well-paying jobs for African-American women in the community.

•WORKS IN PROGRESS

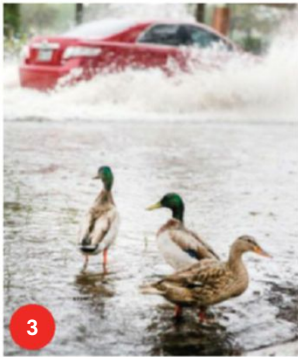
New Orleans Learns to Love Water

A city that's long struggled to stay dry embraces its inner swamp.

BY LAURA BLISS

"NEW ORLEANS filled with water" does not conjure up a promising image, at least not yet.

The fight to stay dry has defined the city's history. In the early 20th century, pumps and canals drained swamps and marshes **1**, allowing development in low-lying neighborhoods



3



9

like Gentilly, on the sunken edge of Lake Pontchartrain. Today, when New Orleans experiences a storm, runoff enters more than 68,000 catch basins citywide, courses through hundreds of miles of underground pipes, and is pumped into canals and over levees into Lake Pontchartrain and nearby Lake Borgne. The city owes its existence to these concrete and steel interventions against nature. And yet, by preventing the



1

replenishment of groundwater, they have contributed to land subsidence—some neighborhoods have sunk as much as eight feet.

When the London Avenue Canal levee was

breached during Hurricane Katrina, in 2005, Gentilly was among the city's most devastated neighborhoods, partly because the area had already sagged below sea level. Since Katrina, the U.S.



2



7

1: CITY ARCHIVES/LOUISIANA DIVISION/NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC LIBRARY; 2: GRESHAM, SMITH AND PARTNERS



Army Corps of Engineers has spent \$14.5 billion strengthening levees and pump stations and building flood walls and floodgates ❷, an essential line of defense. Still, much of the city remains vulnerable to flooding after heavy downfalls ❸.

Now, with a \$141 million award from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, New Orleans is planning to supplement its “gray” infrastructure with green infrastructure. By reengineering how storm water flows through its lowlands, the city hopes to work with its ecology rather than interfere with it. Gentilly will serve as the testing ground for a network of projects that filter and store water

through natural processes. After Hurricane Katrina, “we realized we had such a radically misdesigned landscape,” says David Waggoner, the architect behind the Gentilly Resilience District plan. He explains that the plan “recognizes the city that’s there, but retrofits it.”

With its open lots and wide streets, Gentilly is a good place to restore functional water features to the urban grid ❹. Existing green spaces will be transformed into parks that will do double duty processing storm water. On the 25-acre site of a former convent, a string of wetland terraces will siphon runoff from nearby streets ❺. Native plants are expected to filter

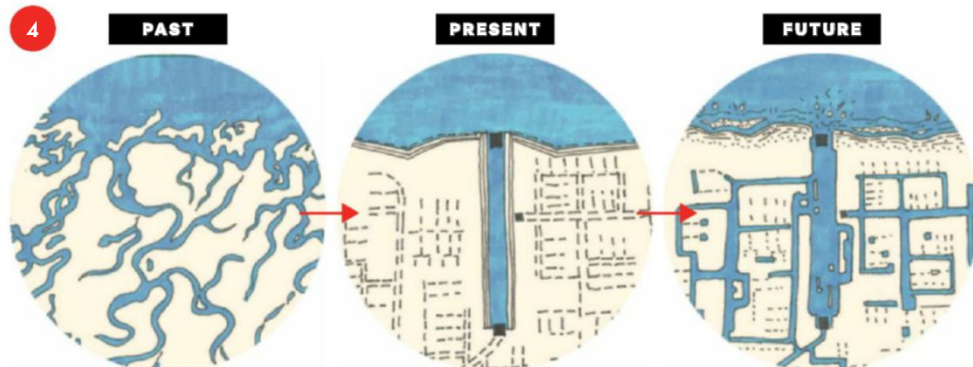
out pollutants, and attractive ponds will hold the water. On some of Gentilly’s broad avenues, medians will be converted into special channels and sunken gardens, through which rain will percolate to the water table. Toward the same end, residents have been encouraged to install rain gardens and bioswales—earthen trenches designed to capture runoff—on their properties ❻. Most of these systems are intended to hold surface water for a few days before dispatching it to storm drains.

Applied citywide, wet gardens and corridors would transform the urban grid ❹, while at the same time balancing groundwater



levels, reducing flood risk, and offering public-health and economic benefits too. “It’s like we’re building a new vascular system connected to the existing one,” a city official told me. Coastal cities around the country—among them Norfolk, Virginia, and Bridgeport, Connecticut—are watching the experiment with interest.

One day, New Orleans might even un-wall some of its flood canals ❼ and use them for recreation ❸, as the Dutch do ❾—the ultimate embrace of a blue environment. “This is about living with water,” Waggoner says. **A**



• BUSINESS

The Curse of the Loyal Sports Fan

The Chicago Cubs' customers show up win or lose—which may explain why, until now, the team has mostly done the latter.

BY JERRY USEEM

IN THE BOTTOM of the seventh inning of their home opener this spring, the Chicago Cubs didn't have a hit, and the 40,882 fans who had crammed Wrigley Field were reverting to learned habit. Attention was waning, and the ballpark—consistent with its reputation as “the world's largest outdoor beer garden”—was buzzing the steady, convivial buzz of a block party. When a Cub finally looped a single to left field, the fan sitting in front of me sounded comfortably numb to the outcome. “Well, if they lose, at least they'll have a hit,” he said cheerfully. Only when the next batter reached base did reality begin to sink in. This Cubs team was favored to win the World Series—a situation that none of the time-tested coping mechanisms could redress. What had been a social event was, suddenly, a ball game.

The Cubs have not won a World Series since 1908, the longest such drought in any major American sport. At the time of that victory, crossword puzzles, sliced bread, and the state of Arizona had not been invented. Heroin was sold over the counter as a cough suppressant. Las Vegas, at last census, had a population of 22. The word *drought* may be a misnomer, as actual droughts (excepting one that supposedly felled Egypt's Old Kingdom in the 22nd century B.C.) do not last this long.

Conventional wisdom has it that the Cubs are either cursed—by a billy goat, a black cat, a fan whose name we shall not speak—or, less cosmically, just plain unlucky. But are they really? A University of Chicago economist, Tobias Moskowitz, asked the same question a few years back and arrived at a startling conclusion: The main source of the

Cubs' curse was the fans themselves.

They are too loyal.

If this sounds like a terrible case of blaming the victim, I never said it wasn't. But Moskowitz bleeds Cubs blue. He grew up in West Lafayette, Indiana, watching Cubs broadcasts and hearing over and over again that the Cubs were simply star-crossed, always finding a way to come up just short. Only years later, while researching his 2011 book, *Scorecasting*—a lively *Moneyball*-meets-*Freakonomics* collaboration with the sportswriter L. Jon Wertheim—did Moskowitz revisit this narrative and find that it didn't hold up.

Some teams, he found, did have a legitimate history of last-minute downfall. The Boston Red Sox made an art of it, pushing four World Series to a definitive

Game Seven between 1946 and 1986 before finally winning in 2004. But this sort of choking requires opportunity. The Cubs have not even made it to the World Series since 1945. In fact, they've made it to the postseason only seven times since then, and five of those trips ended in series they lost 4-1, 3-0, 3-0, 3-0, and 4-0. Since World War II, Moskowitz calculated, the team has finished last or second-to-last in the standings more than 40 percent of the time. The odds of that happening by chance are 527 to 1.

Why, he had to ask, didn't the Cubs field better teams?

Another economist, Philip K. Porter, of the University of South Florida, had wondered two decades earlier whether fan loyalty might have a perverse effect on winning. Baseball teams, after all, make money not by winning games, but by filling seats. And if lost games do not translate into lost customers, the economic incentive to improve approaches zero. Crunching 25 years of data, from 1966 to 1990, Porter found that the teams most likely to win were not those with the loyalist fan bases, but those with the ficklest.

Porter wasn't speaking of the Cubs in particular. But Moskowitz ran his own numbers and found that no team



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Run Simple

better illustrated Porter's findings. For the crosstown White Sox, a 10 percent dip in winning percentage translated, on average, into a 12 percent drop in attendance the following year. For the Cubs, that drop was just 6 percent—the smallest of any team in the majors. Cubs fans were insensitive not only to prices (paying the second-highest ticket prices in baseball), but also to losses.

Surely the Cubs *wanted* to win. But Moskowitz believes that the fact that they didn't *have* to—"I think [just making the playoffs] is already enough for Cub fans," a local news anchor said with a smile last fall—was not lost on executives or players. If young talent isn't paying quick dividends, then sure, trade future Hall of Famer Lou Brock to your archrivals in St. Louis. If teammates don't like the volume of your salsa music, then handle it the way Sammy Sosa once did: "Fuck my teammates," he said.

All of which squares with the comments of the team's relatively new and highly accomplished president of baseball operations, Theo Epstein, whom the team's owner, Tom Ricketts, hired in 2011 to engineer a top-to-bottom remake of the organization. "We're not rebuilding," Epstein told an interviewer in 2013. "We are building a championship organization."

YET PRIOR TO World War II, despite several decades without a World Series championship, the Cubs had been a top-notch club—winning four National League pennants over a 10-year stretch and adding another in 1945 (the year a fan and his billy goat were asked to leave the park). Then the team fell off a cliff, producing a single winning season in the next 20 years. What happened?

In the mid-1930s, the Cubs' owner, chewing-gum magnate Philip K. Wrigley, was poring over yearly figures when he noticed a correlation he didn't like: When the Cubs won fewer games, fewer people came to games. When a team executive mentioned that the public had been conditioned to expect a winner, Wrigley averred that this could be changed. "See those people going by,"

he said from his office overlooking Michigan Avenue. "They are all consumers of chewing gum." They could be made into consumers of baseball, too, with the right advertising campaign.

Wrigley's gum company spent as much as 25 percent of its revenues on advertising—"a rate," *Fortune* marveled, "matched not even by the cigarette industry"—and in many ways functioned like an ad agency disguised in a gum wrapper. Philip Wrigley himself wrote copy, selected artwork, and oversaw ad placement.

The ad campaign he envisioned for the Cubs, he told team executives, would shift the emphasis to "the fun and the healthfulness ... the sunshine and the relaxation" of a day at the ballpark. The idea, he said, was "to get the public to go see ball games, win or lose."

To this end, in 1937, he had ivy planted on Wrigley Field's previously barren outfield wall. A monumental hand-operated scoreboard was constructed that, even brand-new, looked like a mechanical holdover from an earlier era. Wrigley wanted the same "outdoor, woodsy" motif he had just used to convert another property, Catalina Island, off the coast of California, into a profitable escape from nervous tension. Only the eight Chinese elms planted above the bleachers refused to take.

Meanwhile, Wrigley set the gum company's top illustrator, Otis Shepard, to work designing just about all the visual elements familiar to Wrigley-goers today: new uniforms whose colors would pop vibrantly against the field's carpet of green; the circular red C on their front; the stylized cub-face patch; the W flag flown atop the scoreboard after each home win. Most striking of all, perhaps, were Shepard's illustrations for the official game program, which began to feature the faces of fans—not identifiable players—in bright sunshine.

The final piece of the marketing puzzle was the one that hooked Moskowitz as a boy. Any radio or television station that wanted to broadcast the games

could do so, free—with the understanding that the announcers refer to "beautiful Wrigley Field" whenever possible.

It worked. It worked so brilliantly that when the Cubs suddenly plunged to the bottom of the standings in 1948, a near-record 1,237,792 fans still came to the park that season. Wrigley, according to a biography written by a family friend, "took satisfaction in the phenomenal drawing power" of the team. It validated his theories. But the losing part wounded him. "Your loyal support when we are down is a real incentive ... to give all of us a winner," he closed a written apology to fans that fall.

It did not seem to occur to him that the opposite might be true.

As the team's play deteriorated further, he searched for an explanation. In 1952, he wondered whether a different kind of incentive might be the problem. Those new signing bonuses for young players, he complained, were dissipating

the players' motive to improve. And yet, "whenever we traded players away, they seemed to become stars," he acknowledged in the mid-1960s. Maybe they needed a tougher manager, like Leo "Nice Guys Finish Last" Durocher, "to wake them up."

The realization came too late. Arriving in 1966 to a culture that even Chicago sportswriters called spoiled, Durocher got the team to start winning. But his hard tactics sparked a player revolt that came to a head at a 1971 team meeting. "I grabbed Leo and had him around the neck," team captain Ron Santo recalled afterward. Durocher left. The Cubs went back to losing. When, in 1983, manager Lee Elia erupted at the unmotivated losers ruining his team, he was referring to the fans, not the players—"the motherfuckers don't even work," he said of the paying customers who reliably showed up for day games, but sometimes booed when the team reliably lost.

Yet at this point, no amount of abuse could drive the fans away. Like a super-resistant strain of bacteria, they not only

The teams most likely to win are those with the ficklest fan bases.



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held on through the indifferent ownership of the Tribune Company; they multiplied. From 2000 to 2014, the Cubs compiled the eighth-worst record in baseball and still drew more fans than all but four other Major League clubs.

TO MOSKOWITZ, the story is an object lesson in the hidden power of incentives, whose importance can be overstated but not safely overlooked. In his lifetime, the increasingly forlorn Philip Wrigley was accused of seeing the game through an economic lens. What he really needed, Moskowitz implies, was a wider lens, capable of recognizing how one corporate function (marketing) could subtly thwart the goals of another.

The question for the present, though, is: Why not keep a bad thing going? If what the management guru Peter Drucker said is true—that “the purpose of business is to create and keep a customer”—then the Chicago Cubs rank among the great American businesses of the past half century.

The short answer is that Tom Ricketts, who bought the team in 2009, is one of those people Lee Elia thought should get a job. In graduate school, before becoming a financier, he spent a great deal of time in Wrigleyville. He lived a few blocks from the park and met his future wife there. He thought the Cubs should field a team worthy of its beauty. Which they now do. The team outscored its opponents 232 runs to 122 in the first seven weeks of this season.

But what about the business itself? Could jettisoning the “win or lose” philosophy (which helped make the franchise the fifth-most-valuable in baseball) for a “win” philosophy have negative repercussions at the gate? Not in the short term, says yet another Cubs fan turned economist, Timothy Zimmer of the University of Indianapolis. The Red Sox, who have drawn bumper crowds since breaking their curse in 2004, have demonstrated as much. But when a team goes back to losing after winning a championship, Zimmer’s research suggests, eventually fewer fans show up than when losing was a given. “If your brand is ‘Lovable Losers’ and

then you win a World Series,” Zimmer told me, “it’s conceivable you’ve actually done harm to your long-term brand.” Julian Green, the Cubs’ vice president of communications, acknowledges the challenges of raised expectations. “Now that it’s about fielding a winner,” he says, “you’ve gotta deliver.”

By the bottom of the eighth inning in their home opener, the Cubs had put only two runs on the board to the Cincinnati Reds’ three. There were two Cubs on base, though, and “Under Pressure” was playing over the PA system as Addison Russell came to the plate. The song trailed off, the pitch arrived, and

there was a sharp report off Russell’s bat.

Sound travels well in cold air, but baseballs do not. The fans needed to see the ball clear Wrigley’s left-field wall before they knew. The solid mass of the crowd suddenly dissolved into 40,000 separately moving bodies. Strangers exchanged high fives. Beverages were dropped underfoot. And inside that deafening moment, it felt as if Philip Wrigley’s ghost might have finally left the building. **A**

Jerry Useem has covered business and economics for The New York Times, Fortune, and other publications.



• VERY SHORT BOOK EXCERPT

STONEWALL JACKSON TAKES A NAP

ONLY RECENTLY HAS protecting sleep become a Defense Department priority. Current Army policy requires unit leaders to develop and implement a sleep-management plan in theater (though in one small survey of soldiers returning from Iraq or Afghanistan, 80 percent had never been briefed on such a thing). History provides vivid demonstrations of the importance of sleep to military competence. The medical historian Philip Mackowiak compared eyewitness and officer accounts of Stonewall Jackson’s performance during a series of Civil War battles with the general’s opportunities for sleep, if any, in the days leading up to those battles. In 100 percent of the battles when Jackson had had no chance to sleep in the three days prior, his leadership was rated “poor.” In the Battle of Gaines’ Mill, his chief of staff described him as “thoroughly confused from first to last.” The Battle of Glendale found Jackson “benumbed, incapable ... of deep thought or strenuous movement ... uninterested and lethargic.” In the midst of the Battle of McDowell, he was discovered napping.

—Adapted from *Grunt: The Curious Science of Humans at War*, by Mary Roach, published in June by Norton



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•TECHNOLOGY

Your CoffeeMaker Is Watching You

Get ready for home appliances that track your movements and know what you want before you do.

BY ADRIENNE LAFRANCE

HALF A CENTURY AGO, the House of the Future was a marvel of plastic and fiberglass. The \$1 million model home, built for an exhibition at Disneyland in 1957, had four cantilevered, capsule-like rooms arranged around a central column, so that it

appeared to hover about five feet off the ground. Inside were appliances that receded into countertops when not in use, an adjustable-height sink, an early prototype of a video telephone, and a heating-and-cooling system that emitted the gentle scent of saltwater breezes or pine needles. Best of all, instead of a

refrigerator and freezer, the house had three “cold zones,” chilled compartments that could be lowered from the ceiling with the push of a button.

Refrigerator design hasn’t changed that much in the decades since. Nowadays, though, smart fridges almost always come up in conversations about the Internet of Things, a term that describes a network of Web-connected objects designed to perceive their surroundings and communicate with one another.

Today, the refrigerator of the future is an appliance that, yes, keeps your Chablis chilled, but also adjusts its temperature based on the kinds of food it contains, reminds you to drink more water, and automatically orders a gallon of milk from the store before you run out. Which makes it a pretty good proxy for an ongoing shift—one poised to accelerate in the decades ahead—in how people interact with their homes. Here’s what that shift will look like.

1 Sensors Will Surround You

The home of the future will be freckled with sensors that soak up data about all the activity that goes on inside. Systems in the house will then use that trove of information to understand your needs.

Already, certain washing machines can assess the size of each load—and how dirty the clothes are—to determine how much water and detergent to use. A company called June makes an “intelligent oven” (hitting the market later this year) that will use sensors and cameras to figure out what kind of food you’re preparing, then adjust the temperature and cooking method accordingly—just throw in a chicken or a batch of cookies, and the oven will take it from there. Down the road, smart surfaces all over the house will respond to whatever’s placed on them: A countertop could help keep a mug of coffee warm, or make sure a beer stays ice-cold.

Your house will know not just whether

A BRIEF CHRONICLE OF HOME AUTOMATION

HISTORY

1596: Sir John Harrington designs the first modern flushing toilet, eventually installing one for Queen Elizabeth I at Richmond Palace.



1901: The first motorized vacuum cleaner is patented. Its engine is so large, it has to sit on a horse-drawn cart.



1945: A candy bar melts in the pocket of an engineer standing in front of a magnetron—and the microwave oven is born.

someone is home but who that someone is. Existing home-security cameras like the Netatmo Welcome can identify family members upon arrival, and notify you via your smartphone when they detect an unfamiliar face. In the future, such systems will use not just facial-recognition software but also data from biometric sensors, like fingerprints and heartbeats, to identify people. And once your house knows who's home, it can automatically implement their preferences for lighting, temperature, music, and so on. This technology will also let you inside in the first place: When the front door can recognize you, there's no need to carry a key.

Your house may also monitor the systems that keep you going, using sensors to track how much sleep and exercise you get, what you eat, and how your vital signs change throughout the day. (And, if the idea doesn't make you squeamish, smart toilets could monitor your waste for signs of health problems, and perhaps share that information with your doctor or health-insurance provider.) Having a house smart enough to call for help when it detects troubling physiological signs—perhaps your heart rate is too low, or you're not moving around normally—could allow you to continue living independently late in life.

Of course, a home that tracks you so closely will be a little creepy, too. Just think of all that data in the cloud detailing the movements and habits of your family—a second-by-second record that spans years or even decades. Used appropriately, that information will make your household run like a machine. Yet technology companies will be the ones deciding what's appropriate, and that might mean repurposing data about the intimate details of your life for ultra-targeted advertising. Even worse will be the inevitable security breaches. With access to your home's data, a burglar or stalker could figure out when you're likely to be in the house. Then

again, your house will probably know how and when to call for help.

2 Your House Will Talk to You

Thermostats like Alphabet's Nest can already adjust the temperature based on outdoor weather conditions and whether or not anyone's home. In the future, more appliances will anticipate your needs: A coffeemaker that can sense your movements might automatically start brewing as soon as you get out of bed. Lights and ceiling fans will turn on and off as you enter and leave rooms. The fridge and pantry might even compare notes and suggest recipes based on the food you have on hand.

Though many of your appliances will be rigged up to WiFi and voice control, you won't necessarily be subjected to a cacophony of devices vying for your attention. Instead, your home might have a single cognitive assistant—a disembodied, omnipresent voice always waiting in the wings—that could control all your appliances, and even help you manage your life.

Today's Amazon Echo and the forthcoming Google Home respond to voice commands and can do things like play music and remind you of an upcoming dentist appointment. In a decade or two, machine assistants will be able to do much more, says James Kozloski, an inventor at IBM. Along with his colleagues, he patented a system that uses sensors and machine learning to predict a person's needs. Such a system could remind you, just as you're sitting down to FaceTime with an old friend, that her birthday is coming up. It might even change the social dynamics of your household. Instead of one person constantly nagging another to unload the dishwasher or take out the trash, the cognitive assistant could predict the optimal time for completing chores and offer a nudge. Or, better yet, it could wordlessly instruct a machine to do the work for you.

3 You'll Never Be Truly Alone

In the decades to come, an influx of home robots could make today's appliances seem positively quaint. The market for consumer and office robots is expected to surge in the next three years, according to a 2015 report by Business Insider Intelligence, a technology-research firm, exceeding \$1.5 billion and far outpacing the growth of robots in manufacturing.

We already have robots that vacuum, like the Roomba, but in the future we'll also have inflatable robot arms that can scrub surfaces and bathe people, says Christopher Atkeson, a roboticist at Carnegie Mellon, whose lab has produced prototypes of such machines. Eventually, robots will fold laundry, cook meals, and pick up clutter. And if they work well, you won't even notice them. The key to effective robots is "being able to anticipate or predict what people will do," says Julie Shah, the head of the Interactive Robotics Group at MIT. "The idea is to either support [people] or stay out of their way."

That said, some people may want a robot that hangs around. In Japan, a friendly humanoid robot called Pepper that can perceive and respond to human emotion has proved enormously popular since it went on sale two years ago. Pepper might turn out to be the perfect roommate—helpful, kind, and always up for hanging out, but never in the way.

Perhaps the already faint line between online and offline life will vanish, and human relationships with intelligent machines will represent a new extension of our social landscape. Your in-house robot could serve as an avatar for friends and family, controllable from afar so that, with the help of robotic arms and legs, you could dance with or hug a loved one who is halfway around the planet. The real promise of—or problem with—the house of the future, then, might be that you'll never have to leave it. **A**



1959: Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev debate the Cold War through the lens of domestic technology inside a model American kitchen set up in Moscow.

1969: The Neiman Marcus Christmas catalog advertises a \$10,600 Honeywell Kitchen Computer that promises to simplify meal planning. Not a single unit sells.

2015: The voice-controlled Amazon Echo goes on sale.

2035: A cognitive voice assistant debuts that can predict your needs and run your household.

1975

2000

2016

PREDICTIONS



The CULTURE FILE

THE OMNIVORE

The Electric Surge of Miles Davis

How his highest-wattage phase secured his legacy—and ultimately burned him out

BY JAMES PARKER

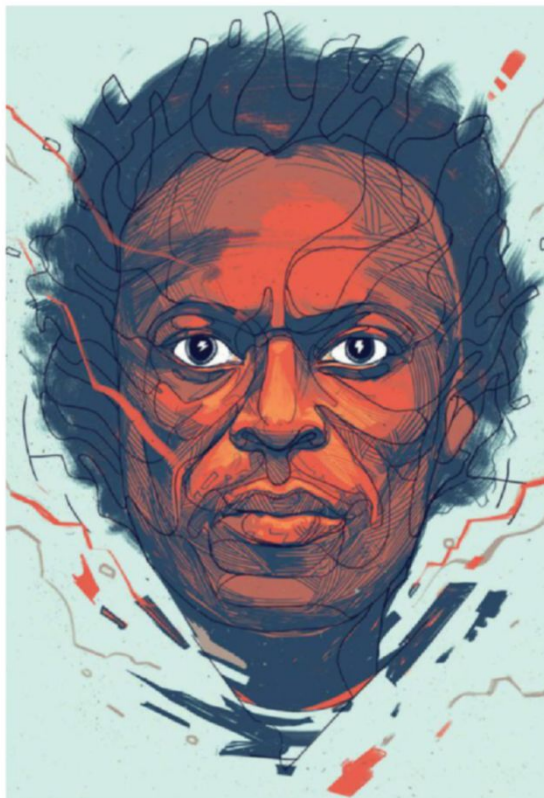
MILES AHEAD, DON CHEADLE'S recent, feverishly imagined treatment of the lost years of Miles Davis, is a movie full of beautiful trumpet sounds: bending blue notes, puffs of self-ironizing loneliness, jubilant noise runs, and savagely abstract displacements of air. But the most beautiful of the lot—which is to say, the most eerily and inexpressibly Milesian—is barely a trumpet sound at all. It's the sound Miles (played by Cheadle) makes when he picks up the mouthpiece, just the mouthpiece, of his long-idle instrument. It's 1979, and Miles has been in a bad way for a while: musically inactive, coked-out, doldrum-bound, and lurking in the basement of his brownstone on the Upper West Side. But now, after years of silence, he is thinking about playing again. His muse, shaggy from a long solitude, is stirring. So he picks up the mouthpiece of his trumpet and blows through it, *ppfft!*, clearing out the devils and the dried spit, preparing to repressurize his own interior. And somehow, in the sound he makes—curt but sacramental, a rasp of pure musical energy, before melody, before anything—is supernaturally disclosed the entire creative dimension of Miles Davis. At that moment, it feels—it *tastes*—like the sound he's been trying to get to all his life.

Think about Miles Davis, try to hold him in your head for a minute,

and you experience a kind of galvanic squiggle across the imagination, like the fingertip signature of some higher-voltage being. The sounds and images will not stay still, extremes of cool alternating with zaps of profane energy. The immaculate apprentice on Charlie Parker's bandstand in the 1940s segues into the withered extraterrestrial of his 1980s comeback. And the mystical mood engineer of 1959's *Kind of Blue* (cleaned up after junkiedom, with John Coltrane at his side) evaporates before the scowling noise addict of the mid-1970s, leaning on the keys of an organ with a misanthropic elbow. "I have to change," Miles once said. "It's

like a curse." And indeed there was something hexed or pursued about his unstoppable evolutions. Futurity coursed through him, through his art, a continual superhuman crackle. It might be said that he sacrificed his nervous system to it not once but two or three times, recording these and other losses in trumpet lines that strike the ear, to quote the critic Lester Bangs, "like shots of distilled passion."

We are currently fascinated—and Cheadle's film is part of this—by Miles's electric period, 1968 to 1975. Last year, two books were published about *Bitches Brew*, the churning, chthonically powerful double album of Afro-rock improvisations that Davis released in 1970: George Grella Jr.'s *Bitches Brew*, and Victor Svorinich's *Listen to This: Miles Davis and Bitches Brew*. This year's contribution to Miles studies is Bob Gluck's *The Miles Davis Lost Quintet and Other Revolutionary Ensembles*, which locates the music



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of his electric epoch within a historic continuum of exploratory jazz. “Electric Miles” is the version who plugged in to the zeitgeist, traded his suits for hipster finery, and opened up his music to distortion and groove-based repetition, either transcending or dramatically repudiating (depending on your perspective) his roots in acoustic jazz. Critics wept—literally, in the case of one tearful pundit at a 1973 concert—as Miles surrounded himself with electric guitarists, electric keyboardists, and extra drummers; wired himself up with a wah-wah pedal; and fired frosty fillips of trumpet-sound into halls of reverb. The Miles of Cheadle’s *Miles Ahead* is, properly speaking, post-electric: Limping around and cursing people out in his cindery whisper, the great man is still neurologically fried from the high-risk, high-yield experiments of a few years earlier, the experiments that continue to freak out musicians and engross musicologists.

Electric Miles grabs us in three ways: musically, symbolically, and politically. Musically, because Miles was channeling Jimi Hendrix, Sly Stone, and the tearing noise at the edge of a James Brown scream, while sounding nothing like any of them. Symbolically, because the music represented creativity at full tilt, at a pitch of invention almost indistinguishable from the destruction (aesthetic and, as it also turned out, personal) necessary to establish its conditions. And politically, because Miles was a militantly autonomous black artist, a whitey-scorning, Uncle Tom-excoriating, no-shit-taking man of his time—and this music, above all, was his statement. In *Listen to This*, Svorinich makes the excellent point that the *Bitches Brew* sessions began the day after Hendrix performed his screaming, sorrowful, polyvalent version of “The Star-Spangled Banner” at Woodstock, turning the national anthem into a feedback chorale. The echoes, the fumes, of this consummate art act were in the ether as Miles and his musicians convened at the CBS Studio Building at 49 East 52nd Street in New York City. Hendrix at Woodstock on Monday, *Bitches Brew* on Tuesday: There’s the summer of 1969 for you.

What happened at the CBS studio over the next three days was without parallel. Looking backwards, we can see how Miles got there. *Sketches of Spain*, in 1960, had been a ritual in a heat-haze, a summoning of the duende—the ecstatic imp that alights, flamelike, on flamenco musicians in moments of transport. The softly electrified *In a Silent Way*, in 1969, was a glittering portal in space, a dreamed-up gateway for the new sound. Nonetheless, when that new sound came—the tremendous shuffling organism of the *Bitches Brew* band, directed this way and that by the hieratic motifs of Miles’s trumpet—it felt like a rupture in the vocabulary. “Pharaoh’s

▼
*The
CultureFile*

THE OMNIVORE

**Futurity
coursed
through
him,
through
his art, a
continual
superhuman
crackle.**

Dance” kicks the album off with predatory, lightly panting drums and doom-green auras of electric piano and guitar. (Grella hails this opening as “the single most ominous thing in the infinite man-years of experience and consumption that pop culture has produced.”) Thereafter, the music intensifies and falls apart, intensifies and falls apart: The layered rhythms—two drum kits, assorted other percussion—clatter and shake; John McLaughlin makes chopped, oblique comments on his guitar; there are caustic sprinkles of electric piano from Chick Corea, and a kind of hubbbling, bubbling underjazz from Bennie Maupin’s bass clarinet.

If a sense of near-terror pervades the *Bitches Brew* sessions, it’s partly because the musicians had almost no idea what they were doing. After gathering them in his customary ad hoc fashion (some were recording with him for the first time), Miles set them off with literally a minimum of instruction—a glance, a gesture—and producer Teo Macero hit Record. As a bandleader, Miles had never said much. As far back as the ’50s, he acknowledged later, he’d been communicating via “silence and evil looks.” But now, winging it with these spooked and reactive players, he achieved total telepathic immersion. He glared and pointed—now *you*—and picked up his horn. With the cold delirium of a single phrase, he could reorient the music completely. Macero taped everything, fabricating the album later with razor-blade edits and a mighty, synthesizing wit. He looped sections, he spliced takes, he did things destructive to real time and thus heretical to the jazz process. William Wordsworth would have approved, however: This was truly “emotion recollected in tranquility.”

By 1975, Miles’s health was shot: ulcers, bursitis, and a disintegrating hip joint that he treated with fistfuls of painkillers. The quality of his music was dropping off, too. If *Bitches Brew* and 1971’s *A Tribute to Jack Johnson* had seen him blowing his red-lacquered horn over the waters of chaos, by the mid-decade live album *Agharta*, he was swamped. He put down his trumpet a few months later, and didn’t pick it up again for nearly five years. The Miles who returns to the stage at the end of *Miles Ahead*—the creaking space lord in bug-eyed shades, purveyor of super-sleek, super-tepid pop funk—is an aftermath figure. He has survived, as it were, his own electrocution. So let him play all the smooth licks he likes, and let his trumpet sound like anesthesia. Because while he was plugged in, while he was sizzling, he opened strange doors that—to use a line from another mutant, David Bowie—we’ll never close again. **A**

James Parker is a contributing editor at The Atlantic.

John Whitney lost his son to cancer, so when he discovered a lump in his own shoulder, he was rightfully worried. He was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and caught the attention of experts at the Lymphoma Immunotherapy Program at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. They treated John with an individualized technique that "teaches" immune cells to attack cancer as they would bacteria or a virus. Today, John's

tumors have shrunk and his outlook is bright, thanks to the groundbreaking work being done at the Tisch Cancer Institute, a National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated cancer center at the Mount Sinai Health System.
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BOOKS

The Assault on Antidepressants

Twenty-three years after *Listening to Prozac*, Peter Kramer breaks his silence and comes to the drug's defense.

BY JONATHAN ROSEN

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, in the middle of reading volume five of *The Princess Diaries* to our elder daughter, my wife came to a passage about a dog who is so anxious when left alone that he licks himself until his hair falls out. The royal veterinarian has prescribed Prozac, but the young princess thinks the dog's real problem is that it lives with her grandmother: "If I had to live with Grandmère, I would totally lick off all my hair." Our daughter was curious about the medication, which she had never heard of. "Wouldn't it be wonderful," she said, "if there was something like that for people?"

There is, of course, something like that for people. It is prescribed by sober clinicians, dismissed by critics who wouldn't give it to a dog, and puzzled over by a public unsure whether it is a life-changing medication or a fairy-tale invention. The confusion is understandable. In 1993, the writer-psychiatrist

Peter D. Kramer published *Listening to Prozac*, his best-selling examination of a pill that promised to revolutionize the treatment of anxiety and depression. In 2010, the Harvard researcher and psychologist Irving Kirsch published *The Emperor's New Drugs: Exploding the Antidepressant Myth*, a data-fueled argument that was lauded in a *New York Review of Books* essay called "The Illusions of Psychiatry" and featured on *60 Minutes*, as well as in a *Newsweek* cover story. "Studies suggest," the article reported, "that the popular drugs are no more effective than a placebo."

Can it really be that Steve Martin's routine from the 1970s—"If you ever get a chance to take these drugs, do it; they're called placebos!"—sums up the state of antidepressants in the 21st century? The short answer is no. But a longer answer is required, and Kramer has written *Ordinarily Well: The Case for Antidepressants* to address what he feels is a destructive level of ignorance and confusion about the class of drugs known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs.

To state Kramer's position bluntly, SSRIs work—not all the time, and not for all people, but in lots of ways for lots of people. How they work remains a partial mystery, and how well they work has a subjective component—as do the afflictions the drugs treat—but murky borders do not mean there is no country. Pharmaceutical companies may have pushed a cartoon claim of "chemical imbalance" to suggest that some people need supplementary serotonin the way others need extra iron, but Kramer bases his assessment on 30 years of clinical experience as well as his own immersion in the literature of drug trials.

Kramer is, however, a reluctant warrior, or perhaps more accurately a cautious one. He has doubts of his own about the unhealthy interdependencies of Big Pharma, doctors, and insurance companies. He is disturbed by flawed drug trials. He takes seriously worries about overprescribing and other "medical horrors." Yet he pushes back, arguing that inadequate data from flawed trials are reason to design better research, not to discount the efficacy of drugs. He criticizes the ease with which statisticians, aggregating disparate studies, discount the effects noticed by doctors who "don't see averages; they see patients." And he keeps the big picture in view: "Almost a third of American adults with major depression receive no medical attention for it." His book is a response not merely to that haunting figure but to the polarized and reductionist debate that casts antidepressants as good or evil, all-powerful or inert. This may explain why he has chosen a title so unobtrusively anodyne that I had to double-check it just now to see whether I got it right.

But *Ordinarily Well* is an ambitious, persuasive, and important book. Kramer looks from many angles at the nature of the evidence—at what goes into gathering it, and at the ways it is read and misread, applied and misapplied. He doesn't just make a case for antidepressants. He makes a case for psychiatry itself as a humanistic science that bridges the impersonal ideals of the laboratory and the pragmatic exigencies of clinical intervention. He is defending treatment—drugs, psychotherapy, or both—that relies on imperfect tinkering. And he is demonstrating why psychiatry's improvisational nature is not a failure of rigor or a rejection of research but a necessary expression of humility in the face of a system so complex that we don't know where the brain stops and the mind begins (or whether there even is such a boundary).

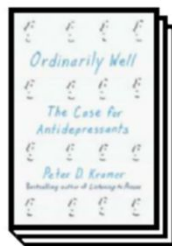
PSYCHIATRY HAS LIVED through schismatic times before. Freud abandoned neurology to devise a closed, self-affirming system of applied mythologies. By the middle of the 20th century, psychoanalysis dominated psychiatry. Mothers of schizophrenics were informed that their parenting style caused their children's illness. Meanwhile, a handful of maverick scientists at the other end of the spectrum turned away from such barbarism to target the brain directly; they were called lobotomists.

Lobotomists, though wrong to stick ice picks in people's heads, were right about where the trouble lay. Psychoanalysts, though wrong to ostracize anyone who even suggested testing their methods empirically, were right about the importance of inner conflict and family constellations, and about the vital role that the therapeutic relationship can play in healing. Antidepressants, along with antipsychotic medication, helped restore psychiatry's scientific credibility without resolving its internal debates.

Kramer came of age as a physician during the reintegration of the field's biological and psychoanalytic heritage. In *Ordinarily Well*, he recalls being a Harvard medical student in the 1970s: "In Boston, recourse to psychiatric medication was thought to signal a failure of imagination on the part of the doctor." SSRIs didn't exist yet, but imipramine, the first modern antidepressant, had been prescribed for two decades. The fact that Prozac appeared to lack imipramine's burdensome side effects—rapid heartbeat, constipation—was one of the things that generated so much excitement after the drug's approval by the FDA in 1987.

Six years later, when Kramer published *Listening to Prozac*, his title brilliantly encapsulated a desire to merge two modes of treatment, the talking cure and the pill-taking cure. The

Lobotomists, though wrong to stick ice picks in people's heads, were right about where the trouble lay.



ORDINARILY
WELL: THE CASE
FOR ANTI-
DEPRESSANTS
PETER D. KRAMER
FSG

word *listening* affirmed the interpretive role of the therapist that the new drug threatened to eclipse. Kramer expressed concern about what he called "diagnostic bracket creep"—the widening of diagnostic categories to facilitate easier prescribing—and coined *cosmetic psychopharmacology* to describe the phenomenon of patients who were starting to feel "better than well." The phrase was freighted with the moral unease of a doctor rooted in an older analytic world where change was earned the old-fashioned way—slowly.

The energy of *Listening to Prozac*—a sort of exuberant ambivalence—was mistaken by many for breathless endorsement, and the antidepressant's fame was frequently attributed to Kramer after the fact. In truth, the drug had already endured a wild ride in the press—extravagant praise followed by backlash. In his introduction, Kramer summed up the drug's first six years as if a turbulent epoch had ended and the time for sober reflection had arrived:

Prozac enjoyed the career of the true celebrity—renown, followed by rumors, then notoriety, scandal, and lawsuits, and finally a quiet rehabilitation. Prozac was Gary Hart, Jim Bakker, Donald Trump.

Kramer was right to recognize the drug's celebrity power but wrong to imagine that common sense, sound judgment, and experience would guarantee a low-profile, unembattled future for Prozac. In short, the invocation of Trump proved prophetic.

KRAMER WRITES with a measure of guilt in *Ordinarily Well* about his desire, after publishing *Listening to Prozac*, to escape his association with the celebrity drug. He wrote a novel, investigated other matters, saw patients, taught (he is a professor at Brown University's medical school). But Kramer's wagon was hitched to a psychopharmacological star 25 years ago, and in the past decade, he found that he could no longer ignore what he felt had become a veritable assault on antidepressants. His thankless but bracing challenge in his new book is to explain how "evidence-based medicine"—a movement that took off in the 1990s with the laudable goal of grounding clinical recommendations in objective studies—has facilitated the opposite of its original intent. It has, he believes, shrunk the circle of allowable evidence and encouraged a blinkered certitude inimical to good medical science.

Determined to meet Prozac's critics on their own terms, Kramer curbs his natural storyteller's inclination, corraling personal reflections and case histories into discrete sections called "interludes" as he delves into serious lab work. The nether region of *Ordinarily Well* is less fun than

the Freudian underworld where bird-headed gods dance with your mother; it is also more frightening—at least for humanities majors. It is the dwelling place of randomized trials, effect sizes, blind studies, confounds, meta-analysis, placebo effects, and the Hamilton scale. But Kramer is an excellent guide as he subjects evidence-based purism—“a near-exclusive reliance on the findings of randomized, controlled, double-blind outcome trials”—to the scrutiny he believes it needs.

Randomized trials were a huge medical advance in the 1940s, but Kramer explains that Sir Austin Bradford Hill, the statistician who pioneered the new design, later warned about their limitations. When it came to testing disorders like anxiety and depression, with subjective symptoms, Hill saw that “to optimize outcomes, doctors would need to adjust doses and observe responses,” Kramer writes, and “the clinician’s perception might be the most accurate gauge of results.” This is precisely what the Swiss psychiatrist Roland Kuhn—who discovered imipramine—did in 1956. Both a researcher and a clinician, he was able to prove the efficacy of an antidepressant that even 60 years later remains a standard, because he saw the patients in his asylum every day and carefully calibrated his trials to his patients’ needs, and to their responses to his recalibrations.

To demonstrate how far we have strayed from Kuhn’s hands-on, informed investigations, Kramer undertakes a fine piece of up-to-date reporting—a visit to a private drug-testing center that conducts trials, primarily with antidepressants, for pharmaceutical companies. He turns to storytelling not to dismiss the value of medical statistics, but to place before the reader’s eyes the main ingredient that never makes it onto the package label: people. It is one thing to be told just how variable placebo effects can be—changing with the weather, the economy, the nature of the “minimal supportive psychotherapy” supplied along with the sugar pill. It is very different to eavesdrop on a community of drug-trial subjects who often help recruit one another—generally from a population very different from the one the drugs are intended for. Some are homeless, others merely unemployed and eager for the social environment of the testing center and the \$50 or so they are paid per visit. Many have an incentive to exaggerate the severity of their depression; they can then remain in the study and receive free health care. Others underreport the nature of intractable afflictions in order to qualify for the trial. Listen, along with Kramer, as a subject supplies answers for a checklist, and you’ll understand his “despair of rating scales.”

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BOOKS

Anti-depressants work—not all the time, and not for all people, but in lots of ways for lots of people.

The rater asks, “When you are in a stressful situation, does your voice quake?”

“Under stress?” Albert’s voice goes up a pitch, cracks, and wavers. “I would say no.”

Kramer is not denying the usefulness of drug trials, but showing how context matters. He also parses the complex reasons FDA tests fulfill their intended purpose (to establish minimal effectiveness and drug safety), yet are a lousy source of information about a drug’s true capabilities, whatever they may be. In other words, extrapolating from FDA data—which critics of medication often do—rather than devising new studies is like using a pass/fail course to determine a student’s caliber.

Ordinarily Well is haunted by battles from psychiatry’s past. Psychopharmacology is often dismissed in language reminiscent of the rhetoric of the anti-psychiatry movement, which flourished in the 1960s and accused psychiatry of duping with dreams, medicalizing ordinary emotions, and treating socially constructed disorders with illusory remedies. Those checklists that Kramer dislikes lent discipline to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, which became psychiatry’s ticket back into the scientific community after its hermetic psychoanalytic heyday. By now, most antidepressants are prescribed not by psychiatrists but by general practitioners; the careful combination of listening and prescribing that Kramer champions has become an endangered activity.

None of these tensions negates the importance of his book—quite the contrary—but they may account for a certain melancholy tone. When psychoanalysis lost its mojo, it was still possible to refer to Freud as a tragic philosopher. Kramer doesn’t want to be a tragic philosopher. His whole book is predicated on the possibility of persuasion in the face of great complexity, just as he believes in the utility of antidepressants in the face of all their flaws. He is the kind of practitioner who speaks of antidepressants as “co-therapists” and describes imipramine working in a “courteous” fashion, offering “modest but invaluable relief.” Kramer also works in a courteous fashion, respectful of his opponents and his readers, in whose patience and capacity for reason he places great faith. All of this gives *Ordinarily Well* poignant nobility. The author isn’t just defending the essential humanism of psychiatry; he is embodying it. **A**

Jonathan Rosen, whose books include The Life of the Skies: Birding at the End of Nature, is at work on a book about mental illness and friendship.



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BOOKS

The Tender Arsonist

In Jesse Ball's sixth novel—part thriller, part coming-of-age story—a teenager seeks escape through fire.

BY NATHANIEL RICH

NOT YET 40, Jesse Ball has published six novels, three collections of poetry and prose, a book of drawings, and a pedagogical monograph, *Notes on My Dunce Cap*, in which he introduces courses he has given at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago on lying, lucid dreaming, and the Brothers Grimm. His novels and stories tend to be set in nameless cities and villages in an indeterminate past. The ambience of conspiratorial menace, together with the accumulation of gently antiquated details—a river traversed by old bridges, propeller planes, “heavy shawls made from the cloth that was the village’s trade,” winding footpaths, a large park populated by gnarled oak trees, a carousel in a common square, a hilltop graveyard encircled by a heavy wrought-iron

gate, a crooked avenue “where the pavement was a bit uncertain”—suggest a *mittel*-European burg of a century or so ago. His prose style borrows from the works of writers of that geography and time, Franz Kafka and Robert Walser in particular, though Isak Dinesen, Kobo Abe, and Nikolay Gogol surface in his archly formal tone and his generous sense of the bizarre. A man opens a package containing a rubber mask of his own face. A young girl watches a puppet show depicting, in meticulous detail, the story of her life. In a parade, a small child dressed up like a mule rides a mule.

Like Walser's Jakob von Gunten, most of Ball's characters are a mystery to themselves, sometimes quite literally: *The Way Through Doors* (2009) and *A Cure for Suicide* (2015) are both about amnesiac characters who awake without memory of their former identity. His plots have



the dark glimmer of medieval allegory. They are filled with games and riddles, and the narratives are themselves riddles that gradually reveal their logic in the manner of a counterintuitive chess opening: Ball's Gambit. As his body of work has expanded, what might have at first resembled pastiche has differentiated into a peculiar vision all his own. Few contemporary American writers can match Ball's commitment to a singular style. His isolated towns and villages, we now can see, belong to a rich, vast landscape—a nation-state, a continent, a world.

How to Set a Fire and Why, Ball's new novel, adds to this world an unexpected dimension. It is set, for one, in the present day, in a recognizably American town. The characters do not have

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**Ball's plots
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and the
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riddles.**

names like “the claimant,” Jesse Ball, or Jurgen Hollar. They're called Hal, Jan, Lana. They use cellphones. Our narrator is Lucia Stanton, an adolescent girl in the wisened-up Holden Caulfield tradition. She speaks in an informal, occasionally profane, deadpan register that would be jarringly out of place in any of Ball's previous novels. She is defiantly unsentimental: “The whole thing about people living on in memory is a crock of shit.” Lucia is too smart for her teachers and guidance counselors—for everyone except the kind, wry old aunt who is her guardian. She reads Antonin Artaud, Alfred Jarry, Benjamin Franklin, Zbigniew Herbert. When the high-school psychologist, during an impromptu therapy session, begins to recite a poem by Rumi (“There is a candle in your heart ...”), Lucia bursts out laughing.

I said, you small-minded bitch, you think that is poetry? Of all Rumi's goddamned poems, you pick that one? Did you find it in some psych-nonsense anthology? That has to be his worst poem, and it isn't even translated well. How does it feel to wade around in life so hopelessly? You are just mired in shit. You're so limited ...

I laughed some more. Of all the poems, that one.

She was looking at me in shock. I think she was actually speechless, so I gave her some more.

Whoever's calm and sensible is insane.

What?

I said, that's Rumi. Or didn't you know?

The girl has style. The line about the quality of the translation is especially good, and her choice of Rumi quotation reassures us that, despite the change of scenery, the spirit of Ball's earlier work is alive.

ONE OF THE TRIUMPHS of the novel is the delicacy with which Ball opens his narrator's smart-aleck voice just wide enough to admit a sincere measure of wonder and dread. In the novel's opening passage, Lucia describes her most treasured keepsake, her deceased father's Zippo lighter. It is all that remains of him. She protects it jealously because “every time someone touches it there is less of him on it. His corpse is actually on it—I mean, not his death corpse, but his regular one, the body that falls off us all the time.” To read Ball is to be reminded of our steadily vanishing lives and marvel that we exist in the first place. “We're just not permanent at all,” Lucia says, “not the way we want to be.”

Lucia's mother is alive, but her mind is gone. She lives in a “lunatic house,” where she gurgles

and soils herself and stares vacantly at a fish pond. “She isn’t actually anyone I know,” Lucia says, “and I’m not anyone that she knows.” But Lucia does not skip a visit. She faces life with grim determination and black humor. Her previous high school kicked her out for stabbing a boy with a pencil, and she has few friends. Things begin looking up, however, when she hears rumors about the existence of a national network of Arson Clubs “for people who are fed up with wealth and property, and want to burn everything down.” This idea, as Lucia might put it, suits her right down to the ground.

How to Set a Fire and Why has the mood of a thriller but the plot of a coming-of-age novel. Although Lucia’s efforts to join her local Arson Club, and later to get revenge on an evil landlord, give structure to the narrative, much of the novel is devoted to Lucia’s thoughts about morality and “the false parade of garbage that characterizes modern life.” Ball calls himself a fabulist but he is also a deeply moral writer, with a fine sense of tragedy. His view of the world might be described as tender nihilism. James Sim in *Samedi the Deafness* (2007) speaks for most of Ball’s characters, and perhaps for Ball himself, when he says:

I know ... that the world is complicated. I know there are problems. I just ... I’ve never tried to think, How can they be solved? I feel instinctively that they can’t be. I don’t believe we are moving towards any eventual philosophical end. I don’t think anything will be perfected. The world has always been chaotic. Suffering is a fact ...

There’s only this: if everyone acts quietly, compassionately, things will go a little better than they would have otherwise. But people will still suffer.

Lucia echoes this sentiment in fewer words: “I’m not sure that there’s any reason for building anything other than huts. Can’t we just live in huts and be kind to each other?” But because she knows that we can’t, that certain people cannot be brought to reason or compassion, Lucia figures she might as well do her best to stop them.

BALL’S NOVELS, despite their gamesmanship, eerie mysteries, and senseless acts of violence, are ultimately celebrations of compassion—our best hedge against suffering. In *How to Set a Fire and Why*, Lucia reaches the same conclusions as her fictional predecessors about the world’s callousness and random malice, but we are no longer in a shadow Europe, or fantastical versions of New York City or Sakai, Japan (*The Way Through Doors* and 2014’s *Silence Once Begun*, respectively). Her

The Culture File

BOOKS

Ball calls himself a fabulist but he is also a deeply moral writer.



HOW TO SET A
FIRE AND WHY
JESSE BALL
Pantheon

concerns are immediate, contemporary, American. She opines about mass surveillance, the brainlessness of personal technology, economic inequality, celebrity culture. “I was thinking: how goddamned Manichaeian this country is. Isn’t it obvious that the world is a meaningless place where there is a faint impression you can leave on each other by being compassionate, but not more than that?” Because the novel is written from the (unreliable) perspective of a teenager, readers might be tempted to discount Lucia’s polemics as a symptom of adolescent rage—the rage of a girl who has lost both parents and, after her aunt dies, her guardian and best friend. But don’t be so sure. In a personal manifesto directed to aspiring arsonists, Lucia writes: “We want merely to have that which is necessary and least.” What’s so irrational about that?

Ball’s fiction carries within it an implicit criticism of the way we live today. It is not exactly sentimental (more often it is bleak, tragic), nor is it nostalgic—the places he writes about did not ever exist. He poses an alternative vision of reality, filled with grand conspiracies united against oppressive systems of rule, Byzantine puzzles that can be solved with ingenuity, and romantic acts of heroism. His fiction is suffused with a melancholy that derives from the knowledge that the real world is indifferent to such elegant fantasies.

Arson may be one way to fight back, but it has its risks. It places the arsonist in great danger of capture and punishment. The only way to avoid that fate, Lucia concludes, is to remake one’s identity entirely. After blowing up the home of her penniless aunt’s landlord, she plans to flee across the country. She will begin again, under a new name. This idea, of “a new life ... disconnected from the life that you have hitherto led,” recurs frequently in Ball’s work. It is an attractive idea—an American idea—and not entirely utopian. We read literature, after all, with the same motivation: to escape what we know for a foreign world that is as beautiful as it is strange.

Ball invites his readers to join a secret confederacy that rejects modern life’s false parade of garbage. It is a confederacy that accepts the implacable demands of entropy and death but nevertheless seeks comfort in puzzle-solving, the exhilaration of a caper, and selfless acts of compassion. “Each fire is a small thing,” says Lucia, as she braces herself for what she must do. “I am coming into a kind of inheritance. I can’t be the only one. There must be thousands like me.” There are. **A**

Nathaniel Rich is the author, most recently, of Odds Against Tomorrow.



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Extreme Gymnastics

Has athleticism eclipsed the aesthetic spirit of the sport?

BY MEGHAN O'ROURKE

IN 1976, at the Montreal Olympics, the young Romanian gymnast Nadia Comăneci flew off the uneven bars in a dismount of astonishing height and extension, landing confidently, even if she took an “almost invisible hop,” as she later called it. The crowd roared, and she turned to look at the scoreboard: 1.00. For a moment, she later told the Associated Press, she was confused. She didn’t think it had been her best routine, but it hadn’t been that bad. Then a judge signaled that the score stood for a 10. At the time, a faultless routine was so inconceivable that the board had been designed to accommodate only a single numeral followed by two decimal points.

Comăneci wasn’t the only gymnast to get a 10 during the Montreal Games. The Soviet Nellie Kim received two, one for performing a novel and difficult vault and the other for her floor exercise. But Comăneci—14 years old, light and quick and pliable as a rubber band, with a ribbon in her ponytail—is the winner we remember. She went on to earn seven 10s during the Games, scores she received both for her aesthetic grace and for her innovative, daring athleticism. On the uneven bars, she pioneered a release move (now known as the Comăneci salto). On the balance beam, she did elegant back handsprings and precise aerial cartwheels. During her floor exercise, she performed a full-twisting back layout, as well as a beautiful Arabian pike (a kind of twisting forward flip). As the Soviet competitor Olga Korbut had in 1972, she captivated audiences with her seemingly effortless airborne moves—an irresistible juxtaposition of tiny girl and intrepid physicality.

Comăneci marked the arrival of an entirely new era of gymnastics, which had been in the making at least since Korbut’s dominance at Munich. She was one of a team of very young Romanian gymnasts trained by the iconoclastic, media-savvy Béla Károlyi at his school in Onești. Inspired by his days as a boxer, he made the girls work very hard at conditioning, and taught them acrobatic skills usually reserved for men.

Other countries took note. Gone, suddenly, were the matronly 20-somethings like Larisa Latynina, who had competed in the 1958 World Championships while pregnant. By 1977, Comăneci writes in her memoir, *Letters to a Young Gymnast*, the new gymnast “was smaller, younger, leaner, and focused not only on mastering technique but also on pushing the envelope on each apparatus to achieve the maximum level of difficulty and the highest possible score.” She added, “It also meant that there was very little margin for error—if a gymnast made the slightest mistake, her chances of victory were dashed.”

Girls all over the world, and especially in the United States (I was one of them), wanted in on the revolution. The conditions were right for what we might call the Roger Bannister effect: Once Nadia did it, others thought they could do it too. Feminist stirrings in the 1960s and the passage of Title IX in the ’70s meant girls were encouraged to be more athletic than ever, making the old-style women’s floor and beam exercises look staid. And radical improvements in equipment—the addition of springs to the floor mat and bouncy fiberglass to the wooden bars—further enabled physical innovation.

Within the span of a few years, women’s gymnastics became a hugely popular and fast-paced sport, featuring not only demanding dance



elements but risky, high-flying moves that had been unthinkable in the early ’70s. At the 2012 Olympics, the American gymnast McKayla Maroney performed an Amanar vault—considered one of the most difficult skills for women—and got more air than Kōhei Uchimura, the male all-around champion. Maroney’s vault was also evidence of another dramatic shift: Over the decades, as Romania’s and Russia’s teams have declined, the United States has become a dominant force in gymnastics.

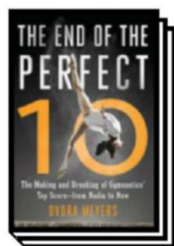
THE INITIAL Eastern-bloc-driven revolution is the backdrop of Dvora Meyers's *The End of the Perfect 10: The Making and Breaking of Gymnastics' Top Score—From Nadia to Now*, but the book's real focus is the subsequent evolution of the sport, in particular its more recent rise in the United States. Meyers, a journalist, offers a strikingly optimistic take, very different from the sportswriter Joan Ryan's account in *Little Girls in Pretty Boxes* in 1995. Ryan portrayed an elite gymnastic world rife with abuse, eating disorders, and emotional misery. She placed the blame largely on Béla Károlyi and his wife, Márta, whose relocation to the U.S. in 1981 helped lift American women's gymnastics to new heights, in part by extending the ruthlessly authoritarian approach Károlyi had honed at home.

Writing two decades later, Meyers offers a much more upbeat view as she chronicles the growth of elite women's gymnastics in the U.S. in the post-Soviet era. Today that world is home, she argues, to a greater diversity of body types, races, and ages, as well as of coaching practices. She also makes the case that high-level American gymnasts have more choices and agency than ever before. Much of the credit for this, Meyers suggests, can be ascribed to another striking change in the sport: the introduction of a new scoring system that emphasized athleticism and rendered the "perfect" 10 obsolete. As she points out, Simone Biles, American gymnastics' current "It Girl," is, at 19, more muscular and broad-shouldered than the waifish 14-year-old Dominique Moceanu was in 1996, in the Károlyis' heyday. If Romania had qualified for Rio—shockingly, the team failed to make the cut in April's qualifiers—Biles would likely have competed against 28-year-old Cătălina Ponor. Little girls no more.

The story of this transformation, Meyers notes, really begins with the Károlyis' defection from Romania. In 1984, Béla trained the stars of the American women's Olympic team, and in 1988 was named head coach. To hear Comănesci tell it, "Béla single-handedly refashioned the U.S. system of gymnastics. In order to be competitive with the Soviets and Romanians, he told the American girls that they had to practice six hours a day, not three." The Károlyis' intensive and controlling ethos (they enforced silence during practice and were rumored to have searched girls' gym bags for food) meshed with rising American meritocratic anxieties: Parents across the country were ready to devote time and money to turning their children into competitive standouts.

The Károlyis' tyrannical approach seemed vindicated when the American women's squad—known as the "Magnificent Seven"—won its

Once Nadia did it, others thought they could do it too.



THE END OF THE PERFECT 10: THE MAKING AND BREAKING OF GYMNASTICS' TOP SCORE—FROM NADIA TO NOW
DVORA MEYERS
Touchstone

first-ever team gold medal, at the 1996 Olympics. But the triumph was short-lived. A stressed-out, injured, and tense U.S. team went on to a poor showing at the 2000 Olympics, with Béla in a new role as "national team coordinator." Time was working against the Károlyis. The dissolution of the U.S.S.R. and the Eastern bloc, as Meyers vividly describes, had brought a flood of coaches to the U.S., who by now ran well-established gyms of their own. And more coaches began opening gyms—among them a former member of the Chinese national team, Liang Chow, and Kim Zmeskal Burdette (a 1992 U.S. Olympic-team member who had trained with Béla)—further weakening the Károlyis' hold on the sport. In a turn-of-the-millennium restructuring, Márta assumed the role of national team coordinator.

Aspiring elite gymnasts now have an assortment of training styles to choose from. Chow, for example, doesn't believe in excessively long days of practice. Zmeskal Burdette and her husband, Chris Burdette, hold weekly yoga sessions and encourage chatter at the chalk bucket (the gym's watercooler). Simone Biles's coach, Aimee Boorman, saw right away that Biles needed to have fun in order to improve. Select gymnasts travel to the Károlyis' gym once a month, which means coaches no longer have to "figure out everything... from drills to progressions to training plans to competition schedules," Meyers writes. Each coach has his or her individual strengths, and Márta works with the gymnasts on consistency and takes care of larger strategic decisions. In turn, the gymnasts get a chance to benefit from multiple advocates. Whether or not the U.S. is any sort of model for other teams facing their own organizational struggles (most notably the Russians and the Romanians), the division of labor has served the Americans well so far.

BUT THE NEW HETEROGENEITY should not evoke visions of seamless harmony. Meyers's own account undercuts her sunny and often too-simple emphasis on a sweeping, scoring-driven transformation of women's gymnastics—the authoritarian ways of the past replaced by a more federated, American-style model of female empowerment. Her sanguine analysis of rising pluralism in the sport turns out to be something of a disjointed muddle: She makes stabs at isolating causes and effects that are more complex than she indicates. For example, she argues that gymnasts can stay in the sport longer than ever. Yet three members of the "Fierce Five"—2012's gold-winning team—have retired (or moved to college gymnastics), citing physical and motivational obstacles to maintaining their peak

training levels. She treats the Károlyis gingerly, skirting controversies that suggest reasons to wonder what the pressure behind the scenes is really like.

And eager though Meyers is to attribute the new pluralism to the advent, in 2006, of the new, and still contested, scoring system, she doesn't clinch the case that the system is the main source of change. Under the old code, an athlete couldn't earn above the "perfect" score of 10. Gymnasts now receive one score for execution (still capped at 10) and another for difficulty (uncapped), assessed by separate panels of judges and then added together. A gymnast's total score includes as many points as she can accrue for her 10 most difficult moves; top scores now range into the 16s. The effect is to give competitors a real incentive to prioritize challenging combinations.

Because scoring in gymnastics (unlike in baseball or basketball) is almost entirely subjective, its structure profoundly influences what the sport looks like, shaping and reflecting its shifting values—whether that might be originality or perfection of technique. No wonder, then, that advocates and critics alike are tempted to link a big swerve in the sport to the now decade-old system. In the eyes of detractors, current scoring (besides confusing spectators) has allowed athleticism to eclipse the aesthetic spirit of the sport. In the eyes of Meyers and other defenders, a system that allows a gymnast to make up ground after a fall has encouraged a culture of risk taking and bold physicality. The numeric flexibility, proponents add, means that a gymnast needn't be as much of an all-around artist-athlete, trained from the age of 3 to master both an exquisite *relevé* and a panoply of tough skills.

There is no question that the wider array of scores reflects, and more accurately assesses, the

The Culture File

BOOKS

Elite gymnastics has been portrayed as rife with abuse. Meyers offers a more upbeat view.

range of difficulty exhibited by today's gymnasts. The two-pronged judging approach also helps minimize inevitable scoring distortions. (Meyers cites a study suggesting that judges can't see all the mistakes a gymnast makes; a single error by an athlete whose execution is nearly flawless is bound to get noticed, but detecting all the mistakes in a slipshod routine is almost impossible.) As for those engaged in the sport's culture war, it's worth remembering that some version of the aesthetic/athletic debate has enlivened gymnastics ever since it took off 40-some years ago. Before we rush to ascribe decisive causal power, for good or for ill, to the new scoring system, we should pause to appreciate that the sport continues to thrive on such contention.

Today's best gymnasts, like Simone Biles, still have it all—both the grace and the tumbling chops. Whatever problems the system may have, Meyers persuasively endorses one important benefit: It emphasizes daring accomplishment over meticulous flawlessness. An obsessive and illusory perfectionism may lie at the heart of many girls' dreams of being a gymnast, but so does a more primal urge, the desire to *just see if you can*—or, as one former gymnast puts it in Meyers's book, to get as close to flying as possible. The desire to witness that convergence of *élan* and power will have many of us glued to the women's Olympic competition this August. When Biles takes the floor mat, what you'll see—I hope—is not a stressed-out, anorexic little girl, but a 19-year-old athlete soaring through the air, fully enjoying herself. **A**

Meghan O'Rourke is the author of The Long Goodbye and the poetry collections Halflife and Once.



COVER TO COVER

The Wicked Boy: The Mystery of a Victorian Child Murderer

KATE SUMMERSCALE
PENGUIN PRESS

WHEN A STENCH led to the discovery of a grisly matricide in July 1895, Robert Coombes and his younger brother, Nattie, had been

sharing their modest East London house with their mother's corpse for 10 days. Downstairs, the boys, 13 and 12, had gone in and out, attending

cricket matches, scrounging for money, playing cards. Upstairs, behind a locked door, maggots had multiplied.

Their father, away at sea, learned of the horror not long after Robert coolly confessed to stabbing his mother in her bed. Greeted by reporters upon landing in New York, a stunned Robert Sr. spoke of his son's large brain and "morbid spells," during

which he obsessively read about ghastly murders. But Robert was also lovable, and doctors had earlier assured his parents that it was just a stage.

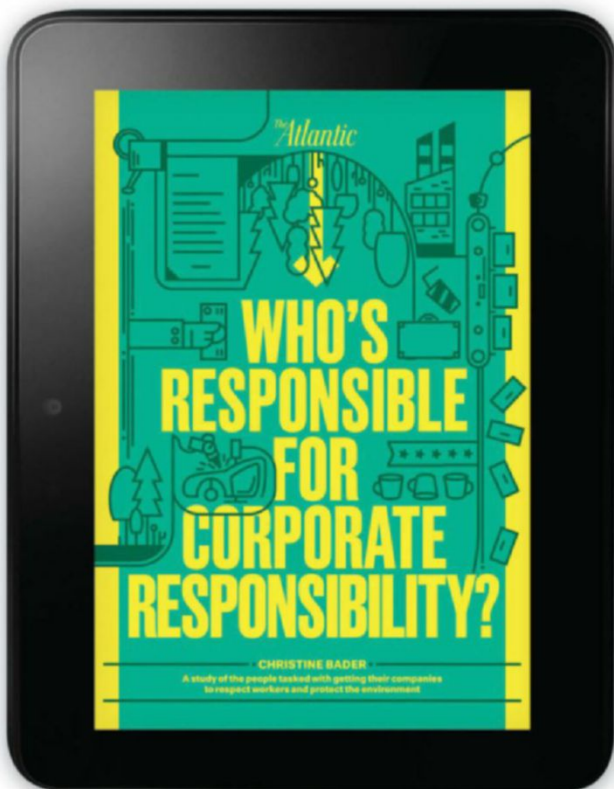
The trial, with its gruesome details and lurid press coverage, offers ideal grist for Kate Summerscale, a former journalist who specializes in revisiting scandals that reveal Victorians in the throes of their own morbid spells.

She expertly probes the deep anxieties of a modernizing era. Even better, she brings rare biographical tenacity and sympathy to bear. She follows Robert, spared the gallows, out of the spotlight and into a lunatic asylum, and then into the horrors of the First World War and beyond. I hope it's no spoiler to say that the doctors were absolutely right.

— Ann Hulbert



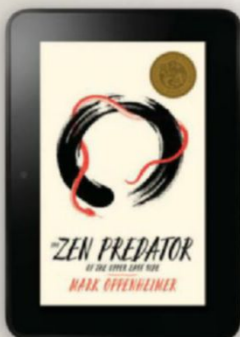
THE ATLANTIC BOOKS



Who's Responsible for Corporate Responsibility?

CHRISTINE BADER

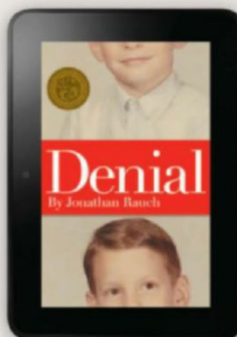
Who has the power to ensure a company is a force for good in the world? Christine Bader, a leading expert on corporate responsibility, takes readers on a tour of the key roles aimed at advancing corporate change on social and environmental issues. She interviewed leaders from Google, Microsoft, Gap, MasterCard, Levi Strauss, Motorola, AT&T, and many other companies to explore the opportunities (and limitations) for employees at all levels to show what good business can do for the world.



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MARK OPPENHEIMER

A story of secrets and sexual exploitation



Denial

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What's Ailing American Politics?

The malady long predates Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders. And until we learn how to treat it, it will only get worse.



By JONATHAN RAUCH

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHIL TOLEDANO



IT'S 2020, FOUR YEARS from now. The campaign is under way to succeed the president, who is retiring after a single wretched term. Voters are angrier than ever—at politicians, at compromisers, at the establishment. Congress and the White House seem incapable of working together on anything, even when their interests align. With lawmaking at a standstill, the president's use of executive orders and regulatory

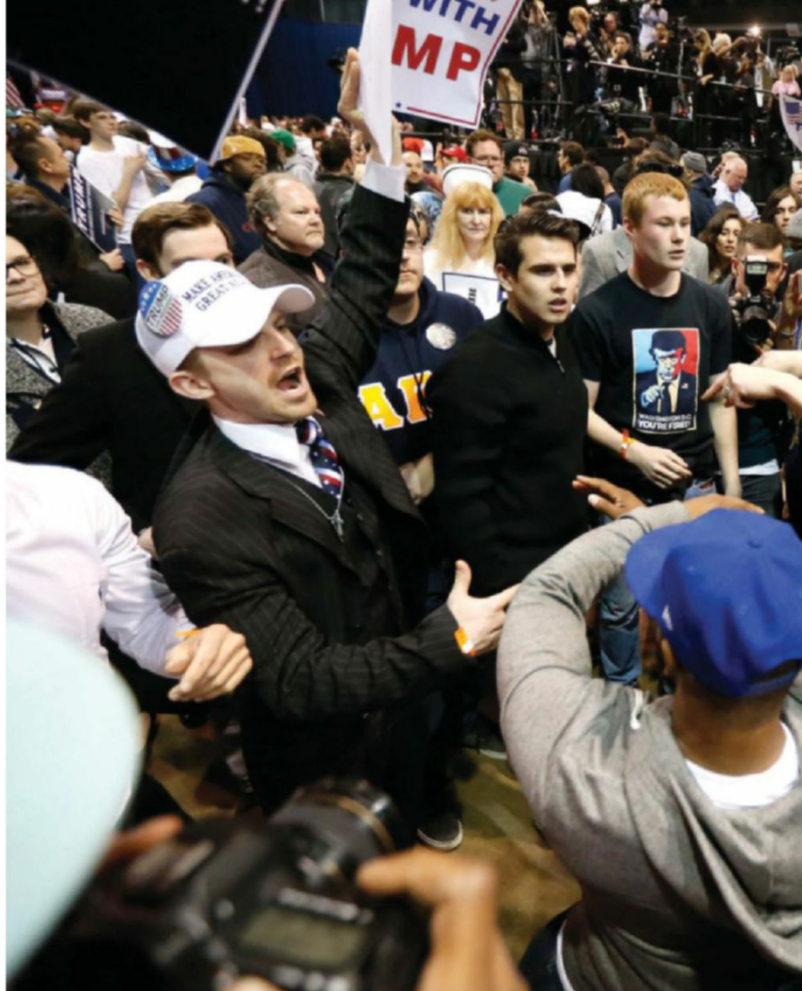
discretion has reached a level that Congress views as dictatorial—not that Congress can do anything about it, except file lawsuits that the divided Supreme Court, its three vacancies unfilled, has been unable to resolve.

On Capitol Hill, Speaker Paul Ryan resigned after proving unable to pass a budget, or much else. The House burned through two more speakers and one “acting” speaker, a job invented following four speakerless months. The Senate, meanwhile, is tied in knots by wannabe presidents and aspiring talk-show hosts, who use the chamber as a social-media platform to build their brands by obstructing—well, everything. The Defense Department is among hundreds of agencies that have not been reauthorized, the government has shut down three times, and, yes, it finally happened: The United States briefly defaulted on the national debt, precipitating a market collapse and an economic downturn. No one wanted that outcome, but no one was able to prevent it.

As the presidential primaries unfold, Kanye West is leading a fractured field of Democrats. The Republican front-runner is Phil Robertson, of *Duck Dynasty* fame. Elected governor of Louisiana only a few months ago, he is promising to defy the Washington establishment by never trimming his beard. Party elders have given up all pretense of being more than spectators, and most of the candidates have given up all pretense of party loyalty. On the debate stages, and everywhere else, anything goes.

I could continue, but you get the gist. Yes, the political future I've described is unreal. But it is also a linear extrapolation of several trends on vivid display right now. Astonishingly, the 2016 Republican presidential race has been dominated by a candidate who is not, in any meaningful sense, a Republican. According to registration records, since 1987 Donald Trump has been a Republican, then an independent, then a Democrat, then a Republican, then “I do not wish to enroll in a party,” then a Republican; he has donated to both parties; he has shown loyalty to and affinity for neither. The second-place candidate, Republican Senator Ted Cruz, built his brand by tearing down his party's: slurring the Senate Republican leader, railing against the Republican establishment, and closing the government as a career move.

The Republicans' noisy breakdown has been echoed eerily, albeit less loudly, on the Democratic side, where, after the early primaries, one of the two remaining contestants for the nomination was not, in any meaningful sense, a Democrat. Senator Bernie Sanders was an independent who switched to nominal Democratic affiliation on the day he filed for the New Hampshire primary, only three months before that election. He



surged into second place by winning independents while losing Democrats. If it had been up to Democrats to choose their party's nominee, Sanders's bid would have collapsed after Super Tuesday. In their various ways, Trump, Cruz, and Sanders are demonstrating a new principle: The political parties no longer have either intelligible boundaries or enforceable norms, and, as a result, renegade political behavior pays.

Political disintegration plagues Congress, too. House Republicans barely managed to elect a speaker last year. Congress did agree in the fall on a budget framework intended to keep the government open through the election—a signal accomplishment, by today's low standards—but by April, hard-line conservatives had revoked the deal, thereby humiliating the new speaker and potentially causing another shutdown crisis this fall. As of this writing, it's not clear whether the hard-liners will push to the brink, but the bigger point is this: If they do, there is not much that party leaders can do about it.

And here is the still bigger point: The very term *party leaders* has become an anachronism. Although Capitol Hill and the campaign trail are miles apart, the breakdown in order in both places reflects the underlying reality that there no longer is any such thing as a party leader. There are only individual actors, pursuing their own political interests and ideological missions willy-nilly, like excited gas molecules in an overheated balloon.

No wonder Paul Ryan, taking the gavel as the new (and reluctant) House speaker in October, complained that the American people “look at Washington, and all they see is chaos. What a relief to them it would be if we finally got our act together.” No one seemed inclined to disagree. Nor was there much argument



historically held politicians accountable to one another and prevented everyone in the system from pursuing naked self-interest all the time. As these intermediaries' influence fades, politicians, activists, and voters all become more individualistic and unaccountable. The system atomizes. Chaos becomes the new normal—both in campaigns and in the government itself.

Our intricate, informal system of political intermediation, which took many decades to build, did not commit suicide or die of old age; we reformed it to death. For decades, well-meaning political reformers have attacked intermediaries as corrupt, undemocratic, unnecessary, or (usually) all of the above. Americans have been busy demonizing and disempowering political professionals and parties, which is like spending decades abusing and attacking your own immune system. Eventually, you will get sick.

The disorder has other causes, too: developments such as ideological polarization, the rise of social media, and the radicalization of the Republican base. But chaos syndrome compounds the effects of those developments, by impeding the task of organizing to counteract them. Insurgencies in presidential races and on Capitol Hill are nothing new, and they are not necessarily bad, as long as the governing process can accommodate them. Years before the Senate had to cope with Ted Cruz, it had to cope with Jesse Helms. The difference is that Cruz shut down the government, which Helms could not have done had he even imagined trying.

Like many disorders, chaos syndrome is self-reinforcing. It causes governmental dysfunction, which fuels public anger, which incites political disruption, which causes yet more governmental dysfunction. Reversing the spiral will require understanding it. Consider, then, the etiology of a political disease: the immune system that defended the body politic for two centuries; the gradual dismantling of that immune system; the emergence of pathogens capable of exploiting the new vulnerability; the symptoms of the disorder; and, finally, its prognosis and treatment.



two months later when Jeb Bush, his presidential campaign sinking, used the c-word in a different but equally apt context. Donald Trump, he said, is “a chaos candidate, and he’d be a chaos president.” Unfortunately for Bush, Trump’s supporters didn’t mind. They *liked* that about him.

Trump, however, didn’t cause the chaos. The chaos caused Trump. What we are seeing is not a temporary spasm of chaos but a chaos *syndrome*.

Chaos syndrome is a chronic decline in the political system’s capacity for self-organization. It begins with the weakening of the institutions and brokers—political parties, career politicians, and congressional leaders and committees—that have

In their different ways, Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders have demonstrated that the major political parties no longer have intelligible boundaries or enforceable norms.

I. IMMUNITY

Why the political class is a good thing

The Founders knew all too well about chaos. It was the condition that brought them together in 1787 under the Articles of Confederation. The central government had too few powers and powers of the wrong kinds, so they gave it more powers, and also multiple power centers. The core idea of the Constitution was to restrain ambition and excess by forcing competing powers and factions to bargain and compromise.

The Framers worried about demagogic excess and populist caprice, so they created buffers and gatekeepers between voters and the government.

Only one chamber, the House of Representatives, would be directly elected. A radical who wanted to get into the Senate would need to get past the state legislature, which selected senators; a usurper who wanted to seize the presidency would need to get past the Electoral College, a convocation of elders who



occasional punishment to encourage politicians to work together. Meanwhile, Congress developed its seniority and committee systems, rewarding reliability and establishing cooperative routines. Parties, leaders, machines, and congressional hierarchies built densely woven incentive structures that bound politicians into coherent teams. Personal alliances, financial contributions, promotions and prestige, political perks, pork-barrel spending, endorsements, and sometimes a trip to the woodshed or the wilderness: All of those incentives and others, including some of dubious respectability, came into play. If the Constitution was the system's DNA, the parties and machines and political brokers were its RNA, translating the Founders' bare-bones framework into dynamic organizations and thus converting conflict into action.

The informal constitution's intermediaries have many names and faces: state and national party committees, county party chairs, congressional subcommittees, leadership PACs, convention delegates, bundlers, and countless more. For purposes of this essay, I'll call them all *middlemen*, because all of them mediated between disorganized swarms of politicians and disorganized swarms of voters, thereby performing the indispensable task that the great political scientist James Q. Wilson called "assembling power in the formal government."

The middlemen could be undemocratic, high-handed, devious, secretive. But they had one great virtue: They brought order from chaos. They encouraged coordination, interdependency, and mutual accountability. They discouraged solipsistic and antisocial political behavior. A loyal, time-serving member of Congress could expect easy renomination, financial help, promotion through the ranks of committees and leadership jobs, and a new airport or research center for his district. A turncoat or troublemaker, by contrast, could expect to encounter ostracism, marginalization, and difficulties with fund-raising. The system was hierarchical, but it was not authoritarian. Even the lowliest precinct walker or officeholder had a role and a voice and could expect a reward for loyalty; even the high-

est party boss had to cater to multiple constituencies and fend off periodic challengers.

Parties, machines, and hacks may not have been pretty, but at their best they did their job so well that the country forgot why it needed them. Politics seemed almost to organize itself, but only because the middlemen recruited and nurtured political talent, vetted candidates for competence and loyalty, gathered and dispensed money, built bases of donors and supporters, forged coalitions, bought off antagonists, mediated disputes, brokered compromises, and greased the skids to turn those compromises into law. Though sometimes arrogant, middlemen were not generally elitist. They excelled at organizing and representing unsophisticated voters, as Tammany Hall famously did for the working-class Irish of New York, to the horror of many Progressives who viewed the Irish working class as unfit to govern or even to vote.

The old machines were inclusive only by the standards of their day, of course. They were bad on race—but then, so were



Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell proved unable to rein in Ted Cruz. House Speaker Paul Ryan has already faced a rebellion. The reality is that there no longer is any such thing as a "party leader."

chose the president; and so on.

They were visionaries, those men in Philadelphia, but they could not foresee everything, and they made a serious omission. Unlike the British parliamentary system, the Constitution makes no provision for holding politicians accountable to one another. A rogue member of Congress can't be "fired" by his party leaders, as a member of Parliament can; a renegade president cannot be evicted in a vote of no confidence, as a British prime minister can. By and large, American politicians are independent operators, and they became even more independent when later reforms, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, neutered the Electoral College and established direct election to the Senate.

The Constitution makes no mention of many of the essential political structures that we take for granted, such as political parties and congressional committees. If the Constitution were all we had, politicians would be incapable of getting organized to accomplish even routine tasks. Every day, for every bill or compromise, they would have to start from scratch, rounding up hundreds of individual politicians and answering to thousands of squabbling constituencies and millions of voters. By itself, the Constitution is a recipe for chaos.

So Americans developed a second, unwritten constitution. Beginning in the 1790s, politicians sorted themselves into parties. In the 1830s, under Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, the parties established patronage machines and grassroots bases. The machines and parties used rewards and the



PARTIES, MACHINES, AND HACKS MAY NOT HAVE BEEN PRETTY, BUT THEY DID THEIR JOB SO WELL THAT THE COUNTRY FORGOT WHY IT NEEDED THEM.



Progressives such as Woodrow Wilson. The more intrinsic hazard with middlemen and machines is the ever-present potential for corruption, which is a real problem. On the other hand, overreacting to the threat of corruption by stamping out influence-peddling (as distinct from bribery and extortion) is just as harmful. Political contributions, for example, look unseemly, but they play a vital role as political bonding agents. When a party raised a soft-money donation from a millionaire and used it to support a candidate's campaign (a common practice until the 2002 McCain-Feingold law banned it in federal elections), the exchange of favors tied a knot of mutual accountability that linked candidate, party, and donor together and forced each to think about the interests of the others. Such transactions may not have comported with the Platonic ideal of democracy, but in the real world they did much to stabilize the system and discourage selfish behavior.

Middlemen have a characteristic that is essential in politics: They stick around. Because careerists and hacks make their living off the system, they have a stake in assembling durable coalitions, in retaining power over time, and in keeping the government in functioning order. Slash-and-burn protests and quixotic ideological crusades are luxuries they can't afford. Insurgents and renegades have a role, which is to jolt the system with new energy and ideas; but professionals also have a role, which is to safely absorb the energy that insurgents unleash. Think of them as analogous to antibodies and white blood cells, establishing and patrolling the barriers between the body politic and would-be hijackers on the outside. As with biology, so with politics: When the immune system works, it is largely invisible. Only when it breaks down do we become aware of its importance.

II. VULNERABILITY

How the war on middlemen left America defenseless

Beginning early in the 20th century, and continuing right up to the present, reformers and the public turned against every aspect of insider politics: professional politicians, closed-door negotiations, personal favors, party bosses, financial ties, all of it. Progressives accused middlemen of subverting the public interest; populists accused them of obstructing the people's will; conservatives accused them of protecting and expanding big government.

To some extent, the reformers were right. They had good intentions and valid complaints. Back in the 1970s, as a teenager in the post-Watergate era, I was on their side. Why allow

politicians ever to meet behind closed doors? Sunshine is the best disinfectant! Why allow private money to buy favors and distort policy making? Ban it and use Treasury funds to finance elections! It was easy, in those days, to see that there was dirty water in the tub. What was not so evident was the reason the water was dirty, which was the baby. So we started reforming.

We reformed the nominating process. The use of primary elections instead of conventions, caucuses, and other insider-dominated processes dates to the era of Theodore Roosevelt, but primary elections and party influence coexisted through the 1960s; especially in congressional and state races, party leaders had many ways to influence nominations and vet candidates. According to Jon Meacham, in his biography of George H. W. Bush, here is how Bush's father, Prescott Bush, got started in politics: "Samuel F. Pryor, a top Pan Am executive and a mover in Connecticut politics, called Prescott to ask whether Bush might like to run for Congress. 'If you would,' Pryor said, 'I think we can assure you that you'll be the nominee.'" Today, party insiders can still jawbone a little bit, but, as the 2016 presidential race has made all too clear, there is startlingly little they can do to influence the nominating process.

Primary races now tend to be dominated by highly motivated extremists and interest groups, with the perverse result of leaving moderates and broader, less well-organized constituencies underrepresented. According to the Pew Research Center, in the first 12 presidential-primary contests of 2016, only 17 percent of eligible voters participated in Republican primaries, and only 12 percent in Democratic primaries. In other words, Donald Trump seized the lead in the primary process by winning a mere plurality of a mere fraction of the electorate. In off-year congressional primaries, when turnout is even lower, it's even easier for the tail to wag the dog. In the 2010 Delaware Senate race, Christine "I am not a witch" O'Donnell secured the Republican nomination by winning just a sixth of the state's registered Republicans, thereby handing a competitive seat to the Democrats. Surveying congressional primaries for a 2014 Brookings Institution report, the journalists Jill Lawrence and Walter Shapiro observed: "The universe of those who actually cast primary ballots is small and hyper-partisan, and rewards candidates who hew to ideological orthodoxy." By contrast, party hacks tend to shop for candidates who exert broad appeal in a general election and who will sustain and build the party's brand, so they generally lean toward relative moderates and team players.

Moreover, recent research by the political scientists Jamie L. Carson and Jason M. Roberts finds that party leaders of yore did a better job of encouraging qualified mainstream candidates to challenge incumbents. "In congressional districts across the country, party leaders were able to carefully select candidates who would contribute to the collective good of the ticket," Carson and Roberts write in their 2013 book, *Ambition, Competition, and Electoral Reform: The Politics of Congressional Elections Across Time*. "This led to a plentiful supply of quality candidates willing to enter races, since the potential costs of running and losing were largely underwritten by the party organization." The switch to direct primaries, in which contenders generally self-recruit and succeed or fail on their own account, has produced more oddball and extreme challengers and thereby made general elections less competitive. "A series of reforms that were intended to create more open and less 'insider' dominated

elections actually produced more entrenched politicians,” Carson and Roberts write. The paradoxical result is that members of Congress today are simultaneously less responsive to mainstream interests and harder to dislodge.

Was the switch to direct public nomination a net benefit or drawback? The answer to that question is subjective. But one effect is not in doubt: Institutionalists have less power than ever before to protect loyalists who play well with other politicians, or who take a tough congressional vote for the team, or who dare to cross single-issue voters and interests; and they have little capacity to fend off insurgents who owe nothing to anybody. Walled safely inside their gerrymandered districts, incumbents are insulated from general-election challenges that might pull them toward the political center, but they are perpetually vulnerable to primary challenges from extremists who pull them toward the fringes. Everyone worries about being the next Eric Cantor, the Republican House majority leader who, in a shocking upset, lost to an unknown Tea Partier in his 2014 primary. Legislators are scared of voting for anything that might increase the odds of a primary challenge, which is one reason it is so hard to raise the debt limit or pass a budget.

In March, when Republican Senator Jerry Moran of Kansas told a Rotary Club meeting that he thought President Obama’s Supreme Court nominee deserved a Senate hearing, the Tea Party Patriots immediately responded with what has become activists’ go-to threat: “It’s this kind of outrageous behavior that leads Tea Party Patriots Citizens Fund activists and supporters to think seriously about encouraging Dr. Milton Wolf”—a physician and Tea Party activist—“to run against Sen. Moran in the August GOP primary.” (Moran hastened to issue a statement saying that he would oppose Obama’s nominee regardless.) Purist issue groups often have the whip hand now, and unlike the elected bosses of yore, they are accountable only to themselves and are able merely to prevent legislative action, not to organize it.

We reformed political money. Starting in the 1970s, large-dollar donations to candidates and parties were subject to a tightening web of regulations. The idea was to reduce corruption (or its appearance) and curtail the power of special interests—certainly laudable goals. Campaign-finance rules did stop some egregious transactions, but at a cost: Instead of eliminating money from politics (which is impossible), the rules diverted much of it to private channels. Whereas the parties themselves were once largely responsible for raising and spending political money, in their place has arisen a burgeoning ecology of deep-pocketed donors, super PACs, 501(c)(4)s, and so-called 527 groups that now spend hundreds of millions of dollars each cycle. The result has been the creation of an array of private political machines across the country: for instance, the Koch brothers’ Americans for Prosperity and Karl Rove’s American Crossroads on the right, and Tom Steyer’s NextGen Climate on the left.

SAY ANYTHING

By David A. Graham

No election is immune to absurd claims and boneheaded gaffes, but the 2016 presidential race may be the most outrageous in living memory. Can you match these statements to the candidates responsible for them?

1. “I think [Bashar al-J]Assad’s invasion of Syria will be seen as a blunder.”		
2. “Supergirl is on TV. I saw it when I was working out this morning. There’s an ad promoting Supergirl. She looked kind of—she looked pretty hot.”	Donald Trump	Martin O'Malley
3. “I don’t have any tickets for Taylor Swift or anything.” (To an 18-year-old college student who raised her hand at a campaign event)		
4. “A lot of people who go into prison go in straight—and when they come out, they’re gay.”	Hillary Clinton	Rick Perry
5. “Well, I don’t know. That’s what they offered.” (In explaining why this candidate accepted \$675,000 in speaking fees from Goldman Sachs)		
6. “I’ll beat her rear end on that stage. And you know what? After I do, she’ll be relieved, because she’ll just be worried I was going to serve her with a subpoena.”	Job Bush	Chris Christie
7. “A broken clock is right once a day.”		
8. “I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn’t lose any voters.”	Ben Carson	John Kasich

ANSWER KEY: (1) Martin O'Malley (2) Job Bush (3) John Kasich (4) Ben Carson (5) Hillary Clinton (6) Chris Christie (7) Rick Perry (8) Donald Trump

Private groups are much harder to regulate, less transparent, and less accountable than are the parties and candidates, who do, at the end of the day, have to face the voters. Because they thrive on purism, protest, and parochialism, the outside groups are driving politics toward polarization, extremism, and short-term gain. “You may win or lose, but at least you have been intellectually consistent—your principles haven’t been defeated,” an official with Americans for Prosperity told *The Economist* in October 2014. The parties, despite being called to judgment by voters for their performance, face all kinds of constraints and regulations that the private groups don’t, tilting the playing field against them. “The internal conversation we’ve been having is ‘How do we keep state parties alive?’” the director of a mountain-state Democratic Party organization told me

and Raymond J. La Raja recently for a Brookings Institution report. Republicans told us the same story. “We believe we are fighting for our lives in the current legal and judicial framework, and the super PACs and (c)(4)s really present a direct threat to the state parties’ existence,” a southern state’s Republican Party director said.

The state parties also told us they can’t begin to match the advertising money flowing from outside groups and candidates. Weakened by regulations and resource constraints, they have been reduced to spectators, while candidates and groups form circular firing squads and alienate voters. At the national level, the situation is even more chaotic—and ripe for exploitation by a savvy demagogue who can make himself heard above the din, as Donald Trump has so shrewdly proved.

We reformed Congress. For a long time, seniority ruled on Capitol Hill. To exercise power, you had to wait for years, and chairs ran their committees like fiefs. It was an arrangement that hardly seemed either meritocratic or democratic. Starting with a rebellion by the liberal post-Watergate class in the ’70s, and then accelerating with the rise of Newt Gingrich and his conservative revolutionaries in the ’90s, the seniority and committee systems came under attack and withered. Power on the Hill has flowed both up to a few top leaders and down to individual members. Unfortunately, the reformers overlooked something important: Seniority and committee spots rewarded teamwork and loyalty, they ensured that people at the top were experienced, and they harnessed hundreds of middle-ranking members of Congress to the tasks of legislating. Compounding the problem, Gingrich’s Republican revolutionaries, eager to prove their anti-Washington bona fides, cut committee staffs by a third, further diminishing Congress’s institutional horsepower.

Congress’s attempts to replace hierarchies and middlemen with top-down diktat and ad hoc working groups have mostly failed. More than perhaps ever before, Congress today is a collection of individual entrepreneurs and pressure groups. In the House, disintermediation has shifted the balance of power toward a small but cohesive minority of conservative Freedom Caucus members who think nothing of wielding their power against their own leaders. Last year, as House Republicans struggled to agree on a new speaker, the conservatives did not blush at demanding “the right to oppose their leaders and vote down legislation without repercussions,” as *Time* magazine reported. In the Senate, Ted Cruz made himself a leading presidential contender by engaging in debt-limit brinkmanship and deriding the party’s leadership, going so far as to call Majority Leader Mitch McConnell a liar on the Senate floor. “The

rhetoric—and confrontational stance—are classic Cruz,” wrote Burgess Everett in *Politico* last October: “Stake out a position to the right of where his leaders will end up, criticize them for ignoring him and conservative grass-roots voters, then use the ensuing internecine fight to stoke his presidential bid.” No wonder his colleagues detest him. But Cruz was doing what makes sense in an age of maximal political individualism, and we can safely bet that his success will inspire imitation.

We reformed closed-door negotiations. As recently as the early 1970s, congressional committees could easily retreat behind closed doors and members could vote on many bills anonymously, with only the final tallies reported. Federal advisory committees, too, could meet off the record. Understandably, in the wake of Watergate, those practices came to be viewed as suspect. Today, federal law, congressional rules, and public expectations have placed almost all formal deliberations and many informal ones in full public view. One result is greater transparency, which is good. But another result is that finding space for delicate negotiations and candid deliberations can be difficult. Smoke-filled rooms, whatever their disadvantages, were good for brokering complex compromises in which nothing was settled until everything was settled; once gone, they turned out to be difficult to replace. In public, interest groups and grandstanding politicians can tear apart a compromise before it is halfway settled.

Despite promising to televise negotiations over health-care reform, President Obama went behind closed doors with interest groups to put the package together; no sane person would have negotiated in full public view. In 2013, Congress succeeded in approving a modest bipartisan budget deal in large measure because the House and Senate Budget Committee chairs were empowered to “figure it out themselves, very, very privately,” as one Democratic aide told Jill Lawrence for a 2015 Brookings report. TV cameras, recorded votes, and public markups do increase transparency, but they come at the cost of complicating candid conversations. “The idea that Washington would work better if there were TV cameras monitoring every conversation gets it exactly wrong,” the Democratic former Senate majority leader Tom Daschle wrote in 2014, in his foreword to the book *City of Rivals*. “The lack of opportunities for honest dialogue and creative give-and-take lies at the root of today’s dysfunction.”

We reformed pork. For most of American history, a principal goal of any member of Congress was to bring home bacon for his district. Pork-barrel spending never really cost very much, and it helped glue Congress together by giving members a kind of currency to trade: You support my pork, and I’ll support yours. Also, because pork was dispensed by powerful appropriations committees with input from senior congressional leaders, it provided a handy way for the leadership to buy votes and reward loyalists. Starting in the ’70s, however, and then snowballing in the ’90s, the regular appropriations process broke down, a casualty of reforms that weakened appropriators’ power, of “sunshine laws” that reduced their autonomy, and of polarization that complicated negotiations. Conservatives and liberals alike attacked pork-barreling as corrupt, culminating in early 2011, when a strange-bedfellows coalition of Tea Partiers and progressives banned earmarking, the practice of dropping goodies into bills as a way to attract votes—including, ironically, votes for politically painful spending reductions.

Congress has not passed all its annual appropriations bills in

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20 years, and more than \$300 billion a year in federal spending goes out the door without proper authorization. Routine business such as passing a farm bill or a surface-transportation bill now takes years instead of weeks or months to complete. Today two-thirds of federal-program spending (excluding interest on the national debt) runs on formula-driven autopilot. This automatic spending by so-called entitlement programs eludes the discipline of being regularly voted on, dwarfs old-fashioned pork in magnitude, and is so hard to restrain that it's often called the "third rail" of politics. The political cost has also been high: Congressional leaders lost one of their last remaining tools to induce followership and team play. "Trying to be a leader where you have no sticks and very few carrots is dang near impossible," the Republican former Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott told CNN in 2013, shortly after renegade Republicans pointlessly shut down the government. "Members don't get anything from you and leaders don't give anything. They don't feel like you can reward them or punish them."

Like campaign contributions and smoke-filled rooms, pork is a tool of democratic governance, not a violation of it. It can be used for corrupt purposes but also, very often, for vital ones. As the political scientist Diana Evans wrote in a 2004 book, *Greasing the Wheels: Using Pork Barrel Projects to Build Majority Coalitions in Congress*, "The irony is this: pork barreling, despite its much maligned status, gets things done." In 1964, to cite

sweep them all away, and one finds that business is not getting done at all. The political reforms of the past 40 or so years have pushed toward disintermediation—by favoring amateurs and outsiders over professionals and insiders; by privileging populism and self-expression over mediation and mutual restraint; by stripping middlemen of tools they need to organize the political system. All of the reforms promote an individualistic, atomized model of politics in which there are candidates and there are voters, but there is nothing in between. Other, larger trends, to be sure, have also contributed to political disorganization, but the war on middlemen has amplified and accelerated them.

III. PATHOGENS

Donald Trump and other viruses

By the beginning of this decade, the political system's organic defenses against outsiders and insurgents were visibly crumbling. All that was needed was for the right virus to come along and exploit the opening. As it happened, two came along.

In 2009, on the heels of President Obama's election and the economic-bailout packages, angry fiscal conservatives launched the Tea Party insurgency and watched, somewhat to their own astonishment, as it swept the country. Tea Partiers shared some of the policy predilections of loyal Republican partisans, but their mind-set was angrily anti-establishment. In a 2013 Pew Research poll, more than 70 percent of them disapproved of Republican leaders in Congress. In a 2010 Pew poll, they had rejected compromise by similar margins. They thought nothing of mounting primary challenges against Republican incumbents, and they made a special point of targeting Republicans who compromised with Democrats or even with Republican leaders. In Congress, the Republican House leadership soon found itself facing a GOP caucus whose members were too worried about "getting primaried" to vote for the compromises necessary to govern—or even to keep the government open. Threats from the Tea Party and other purist factions often outweigh any blandishments or protection that leaders can offer.

So far the Democrats have been mostly spared the anti-compromise insurrection, but their defenses are not much stronger. Molly Ball recently reported for *The Atlantic's* Web site on the Working Families Party, whose purpose is "to make Democratic politicians more accountable to their liberal base through the asymmetric warfare party primaries enable, much as the conservative movement has done to Republicans." Because African Americans and union members still mostly behave like party loyalists, and because the Democratic base does not want to see President Obama fail, the Tea Party trick hasn't yet worked on the left. But the Democrats are vulnerable structurally, and the anti-compromise virus is out there.

A second virus was initially identified in 2002, by the University of Nebraska at Lincoln political scientists John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, in their book *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs About How Government Should Work*. It's a shocking book, one whose implications other scholars were understandably reluctant to engage with. The rise of Donald



Donald Trump had no political debts or party loyalty. And he had no compunctions—which made him the perfect vector for anti-establishment sentiment.

one famous example, Lyndon Johnson could not have passed his landmark civil-rights bill without support from House Republican leader Charles Halleck of Indiana, who named his price: a NASA research grant for his district, which LBJ was glad to provide. Just last year, Republican Senator John McCain, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, was asked how his committee managed to pass bipartisan authorization bills year after year, even as the rest of Congress ground to a legislative standstill. In part, McCain explained, it was because "there's a lot in there for members of the committees."

Party-dominated nominating processes, soft money, congressional seniority, closed-door negotiations, pork-barrel spending—put each practice under a microscope in isolation, and it seems an unsavory way of doing political business. But



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Trump and Bernie Sanders, however, makes confronting its thesis unavoidable.

Using polls and focus groups, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse found that between 25 and 40 percent of Americans (depending on how one measures) have a severely distorted view of how government and politics are supposed to work. I think of these people as “politiphobes,” because they see the contentious give-and-take of politics as unnecessary and distasteful. Specifically, they believe that obvious, commonsense solutions to the country’s problems are out there for the plucking. The reason these obvious solutions are not enacted is that politicians are corrupt, or self-interested, or addicted to unnecessary partisan feuding. Not surprisingly, politiphobes think the obvious, commonsense solutions are the sorts of solutions that they themselves prefer. But the more important point is that they do not acknowledge that meaningful policy disagreement even *exists*. From that premise, they conclude that all the arguing and partisanship and horse-trading that go on in American politics are entirely unnecessary. Politicians could easily solve all our problems if they would only set aside their craven personal agendas.

If politicians won’t do the job, then who will? Politiphobes, according to Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, believe policy should be made not by messy political conflict and negotiations but by ENSIDS: empathetic, non-self-interested decision makers. These are leaders who will step forward, cast aside cowardly politicians and venal special interests, and implement long-overdue solutions. ENSIDS can be politicians, technocrats, or autocrats—whatever works. Whether the process is democratic is not particularly important.

Chances are that politiphobes have been out there since long before Hibbing and Theiss-Morse identified them in 2002. Unlike the Tea Party or the Working Families Party, they aren’t particularly ideological: They have popped up left, right, and center. Ross Perot’s independent presidential candidacies of 1992 and 1996 appealed to the idea that any sensible businessman could knock heads together and fix Washington. In 2008, Barack Obama pandered to a center-left version of the same fantasy, promising to magically transcend partisan politics and implement the best solutions from both parties.

No previous outbreak, however, compares with the latest one, which draws unprecedented virulence from two developments. One is a steep rise in antipolitical sentiment, especially on the right. According to polling by Pew, from 2007 to early 2016 the percentage of Americans saying they would be less likely to vote for a presidential candidate who had been an elected official in Washington for many years than for an outsider candidate more than doubled, from 15 percent to 31 percent. Republican opinion has shifted more sharply still: The percentage of Republicans preferring “new ideas and a different approach” over “experience and a proven record” almost doubled in just the six months from March to September of 2015.

The other development, of course, was Donald Trump, the perfect vector to concentrate politiphobic sentiment, intensify

it, and inject it into presidential politics. He had too much money and free media to be spent out of the race. He had no political record to defend. He had no political debts or party loyalty. He had no compunctions. There was nothing to restrain him from sounding every note of the politiphobic fantasy with perfect pitch.

Democrats have not been immune, either. Like Trump, Bernie Sanders appealed to the antipolitical idea that the mere act of voting for him would prompt a “revolution” that would somehow clear up such knotty problems as health-care coverage, financial reform, and money in politics. Like Trump, he was a self-sufficient outsider without customary political debts or party loyalty. Like Trump, he neither acknowledged nor cared—because his supporters neither acknowledged nor cared—that his plans for governing were delusional.

Trump, Sanders, and Ted Cruz have in common that they are political sociopaths—meaning not that they are crazy, but that they don’t care what other politicians think about their behavior and they don’t need to care. That three of the four final presidential contenders in 2016 were political sociopaths is a sign of how far chaos syndrome has gone. The old, mediated system selected such people out. The new, disintermediated system seems to be selecting them in.

IV. SYMPTOMS

The disorder that exacerbates all other disorders

There is nothing new about political insurgencies in the United States—nor anything inherently wrong with them. Just the opposite, in fact: Insurgencies have brought fresh ideas and renewed participation to the political system since at least the time of Andrew Jackson.

There is also nothing new about insiders losing control of the presidential nominating process. In 1964 and 1972, to the dismay of party regulars, nominations went to unelectable candidates—Barry Goldwater for the Republicans in 1964 and George McGovern for the Democrats in 1972—who thrilled the parties’ activist bases and went on to predictably epic defeats. So it’s tempting to say, “Democracy is messy. Insurgents have fair gripes. Incumbents should be challenged. Who are you, Mr. Establishment, to say the system is broken merely because you don’t like the people it is pushing forward?”

The problem is not, however, that disruptions happen. The problem is that chaos syndrome wreaks havoc on the system’s ability to absorb and channel disruptions. Trying to quash political disruptions would probably only create more of them. The trick is to be able to *govern through* them.

Leave aside the fact that Goldwater and McGovern, although ideologues, were estimable figures within their parties. (McGovern actually co-chaired a Democratic Party commission that rewrote the nominating rules after 1968, opening the way for his own campaign.) Neither of them, either as senator or candidate, wanted to or did disrupt the ordinary workings of government.

Jason Grumet, the president of the Bipartisan Policy Center and the author of *City of Rivals*, likes to point out that within three weeks of Bill Clinton’s impeachment by the House of Representatives, the president was signing new laws again.

**“PORK” CAN BE A VITAL
TOOL OF DEMOCRATIC
GOVERNANCE.**





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“While they were *impeaching* him they were negotiating, they were talking, they were having committee hearings,” Grumet said in a recent speech. “And so we have to ask ourselves, what is it that not long ago allowed our government to metabolize the aggression that is inherent in any pluralistic society and still get things done?”

I have been covering Washington since the early 1980s, and I’ve seen a lot of gridlock. Sometimes I’ve been *grateful* for gridlock, which is an appropriate outcome when there is no working majority for a particular policy. For me, however, 2011 brought a wake-up call. The system was failing even when there *was* a working majority. That year, President Obama and Republican House Speaker John Boehner, in intense personal negotiations, tried to clinch a budget agreement that touched both parties’ sacred cows, curtailing growth in the major entitlement programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security by hundreds of billions of dollars and increasing revenues by \$800 billion or more over 10 years, as well as reducing defense and nondefense discretionary spending by more than \$1 trillion. Though it was less grand than previous budgetary “grand bargains,” the package represented the kind of bipartisan accommodation that constitutes the federal government’s best and perhaps only path to long-term fiscal stability.

People still debate why the package fell apart, and there is blame enough to go around. My own reading at the time, however, concurred with Matt Bai’s postmortem in *The New York Times*: Democratic leaders could have found the rank-and-file support they needed to pass the bargain, but Boehner could not get the deal past conservatives in his own caucus. “What’s undeniable, despite all the furious efforts to peddle a different story,” Bai wrote, “is that Obama managed to persuade his closest allies to sign off on what he wanted them to do, and Boehner didn’t, or couldn’t.” We’ll never know, but I believe that the kind of budget compromise Boehner and Obama tried to shake hands on, had it reached a vote, would have passed with solid majorities in both chambers and been signed into law. The problem was not polarization; it was disorganization. A latent majority could not muster and assert itself.

As soon became apparent, Boehner’s 2011 debacle was not a glitch but part of an emerging pattern. Two years later, the House’s conservative faction shut down the government with the connivance of Ted Cruz, the very last thing most Republicans wanted to happen. When Boehner was asked by Jay Leno why he had permitted what the speaker himself called a “very predictable disaster,” he replied, rather poignantly: “When I looked up, I saw my colleagues going this way. You learn that a leader without followers is simply a man taking a walk.”

Boehner was right. Washington doesn’t have a crisis of leadership; it has a crisis of followership. One can argue about particulars, and Congress does better on some occasions than

Former House Speaker John Boehner explained to Jay Leno before he resigned: “You learn that a leader without followers is simply a man taking a walk.”

on others. Overall, though, minority factions and veto groups are becoming ever more dominant on Capitol Hill as leaders watch their organizational capacity dribble away. Helpless to do much more than beg for support, and hostage to his own party’s far right, an exhausted Boehner finally gave up and quit last year. Almost immediately, his heir apparent, Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, was shot to pieces

too. No wonder Paul Ryan, in his first act as speaker, remonstrated with his own colleagues against chaos.

Nevertheless, by spring the new speaker was bogged down. “Almost six months into the job, Ryan and his top lieutenants face questions about whether the Wisconsin Republican’s tenure atop the House is any more effective than his predecessor,” *Politico*’s Web site reported in April. The House Republican Conference, an unnamed Republican told *Politico*, is “unwhippable and unleadable. Ryan is as talented as you can be: There’s nobody better. But even he can’t do anything. Who could?”

Of course, Congress’s incompetence makes the electorate even more disgusted, which leads to even greater political volatility. In a Republican presidential debate in March, Ohio Governor John Kasich described the cycle this way: The people, he said, “want change, and they keep putting outsiders in to bring about the change. Then the change doesn’t come ... because we’re putting people in that don’t understand compromise.” Disruption in politics and dysfunction in government reinforce each other. Chaos becomes the new normal.

Being a disorder of the immune system, chaos syndrome magnifies other problems, turning political head colds into



**NEUROTIC HATRED
OF THE POLITICAL
CLASS IS THE COUNTRY'S
LAST UNIVERSALLY
ACCEPTABLE FORM OF
BIGOTRY.**





pneumonia. Take polarization. Over the past few decades, the public has become sharply divided across partisan and ideological lines. Chaos syndrome compounds the problem, because even when Republicans and Democrats do find something to work together on, the threat of an extremist primary challenge funded by a flood of outside money makes them think twice—or not at all. Opportunities to make bipartisan legislative advances slip away.

Or take the new technologies that are revolutionizing the media. Today, a figure like Trump can reach millions through Twitter without needing to pass network-TV gatekeepers or spend a dime. A figure like Sanders can use the Internet to reach millions of donors without recourse to traditional fund-raising sources. Outside groups, friendly and unfriendly alike, can drown out political candidates in their own races. (As a frustrated Cruz told a supporter about outside groups ostensibly backing his presidential campaign, “I’m left to just hope that what they say bears some resemblance to what I actually believe.”) Disruptive media technologies are nothing new in American politics; they have arisen periodically since the early 19th century, as the historian Jill Lepore noted in a February article in *The New Yorker*. What is new is the system’s difficulty in coping with them. Disintermediating technologies bring fresh voices into the fray, but they also bring atomization and cacophony. To organize coherent plays amid swarms of attack ads, middlemen need to be able to coordinate the fund-raising and messaging of candidates and parties and activists—which is what they are increasingly hard-pressed to do.

Assembling power to govern a sprawling, diverse, and increasingly divided democracy is inevitably hard. Chaos syndrome makes it all the harder. For Democrats, the disorder is merely chronic; for the Republican Party, it is acute. Finding no precedent for what he called Trump’s hijacking of an entire political party, Jon Meacham went so far as to tell Joe Scarborough in *The Washington Post* that George W. Bush might prove to be the last Republican president.

Nearly everyone panned party regulars for not stopping Trump much earlier, but no one explained just how the party regulars were supposed to have done that. Stopping an insurgency requires organizing a coalition against it, but an incapacity to organize is the whole problem. The reality is that the levers and buttons parties and political professionals might once have pulled and pushed had long since been disconnected.

V. PROGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

Chaos syndrome as a psychiatric disorder

I don’t have a quick solution to the current mess, but I do think it would be easy, in principle, to start moving in a better direction. Although returning parties and middlemen to anything like their 19th-century glory is not conceivable—or, in today’s America, even desirable—strengthening parties and middlemen is very doable. Restrictions inhibiting the parties from coordinating with their own candidates serve to encourage political wildcatting, so repeal them. Limits on donations to the

parties drive money to unaccountable outsiders, so lift them. Restoring the earmarks that help grease legislative success requires nothing more than a change in congressional rules. And there are all kinds of ways the parties could move insiders back to the center of the nomination process. If they wanted to, they could require would-be candidates to get petition signatures from elected officials and county party chairs, or they could send unbound delegates to their conventions (as several state parties are doing this year), or they could enhance the role of middlemen in a host of other ways.

Building party machines and political networks is what career politicians naturally do, if they’re allowed to do it. So let them. I’m not talking about rigging the system to exclude challengers or prevent insurgencies. I’m talking about *de-rigging* the system to reduce its pervasive bias against middlemen. Then they can do their job, thereby making the world safe for challengers and insurgencies.

Unfortunately, although the mechanics of de-rigging are fairly straightforward, the politics of it are hard. The public is wedded to an anti-establishment narrative. The political-reform community is invested in direct participation, transparency, fund-raising limits on parties, and other elements of the anti-intermediation worldview. The establishment, to the extent that there still is such a thing, is demoralized and shattered, barely able to muster an argument for its own existence.

But there are optimistic signs, too. Liberals in the campaign-finance-reform community are showing new interest in strengthening the parties. Academics and commentators are getting a good look at politics without effective organizers and cohesive organizations, and they are terrified. On Capitol Hill, conservatives and liberals alike are on board with restoring regular order in Congress. In Washington, insiders have had some success at reorganizing and pushing back. No Senate Republican was defeated by a primary challenger in 2014, in part because then-Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a machine politician par excellence, created a network of business allies to counterpunch against the Tea Party.

The biggest obstacle, I think, is the general public’s reflexive, unreasoning hostility to politicians and the process of politics. Neurotic hatred of the political class is the country’s last universally acceptable form of bigotry. Because that problem is mental, not mechanical, it really is hard to remedy.

In March, a Trump supporter told *The New York Times*, “I want to see Trump go up there and do damage to the Republican Party.” Another said, “We know who Donald Trump is, and we’re going to use Donald Trump to either take over the G.O.P. or blow it up.” That kind of anti-establishment nihilism deserves no respect or accommodation in American public life. Populism, individualism, and a skeptical attitude toward politics are all healthy up to a point, but America has passed that point. Political professionals and parties have many shortcomings to answer for—including, primarily on the Republican side, their self-mutilating embrace of anti-establishment rhetoric—but relentlessly bashing them is no solution. You haven’t heard anyone say this, but it’s time someone did: Our most pressing political problem today is that the country abandoned the establishment, not the other way around. **A**

Jonathan Rauch is a contributing editor at The Atlantic and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

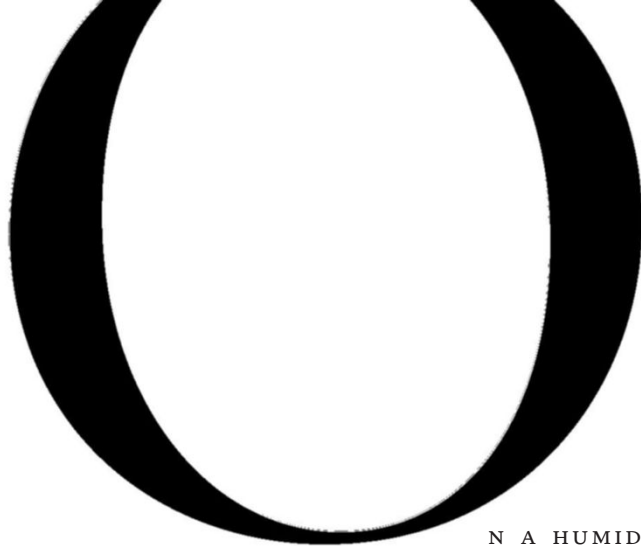
THE UNBELIEVABLE TALE OF
**JESUS'S
WIFE**

A HOTLY CONTESTED, SUPPOSEDLY ANCIENT MANUSCRIPT SUGGESTS THAT JESUS WAS MARRIED, BUT BELIEVING ITS ORIGIN STORY—A REAL-LIFE *DA VINCI CODE*, INVOLVING A HARVARD PROFESSOR, A ONETIME FLORIDA PORNOGRAPHER, AND AN ESCAPE FROM EAST GERMANY—REQUIRES A BIG LEAP OF FAITH.

By
ARIEL SABAR

Illustration by
MARC BURCKHARDT





N A HUMID

afternoon this past November, I pulled off Interstate 75 into a stretch of Florida pine forest tangled with runaway vines. My GPS was homing in on the house of a man I thought might hold the master key to one of the strangest scholarly mysteries in recent decades: a 1,300-year-old scrap of papyrus that bore the phrase “Jesus said to them, My wife.” The fragment, written in the ancient language of Coptic, had set off shock waves when an eminent Harvard historian of early Christianity, Karen L. King, presented it in September 2012 at a conference in Rome.

Never before had an ancient manuscript alluded to Jesus’s being married. The papyrus’s lines were incomplete, but they seemed to describe a dialogue between Jesus and the apostles over whether his “wife”—possibly Mary Magdalene—was “worthy” of discipleship. Its main point, King argued, was that “women who are wives and mothers can be Jesus’s disciples.” She thought the passage likely figured into ancient debates over whether “marriage or celibacy [was] the ideal mode of Christian life” and, ultimately, whether a person could be both sexual and holy.

King called the business-card-size papyrus “The Gospel of Jesus’s Wife.” But even without that provocative title, it would have shaken the world of biblical scholarship. Centuries of Christian tradition are bound up in whether the scrap is authentic or, as a growing group of scholars contends, an outrageous modern fake: Jesus’s bachelorhood helps form the basis for priestly celibacy, and his all-male cast of apostles has long been cited to justify limits on women’s religious leadership. In the Roman Catholic Church in particular, the New Testament is seen as divine revelation handed down through a long line of men—Jesus, the 12 apostles, the Church fathers, the popes, and finally the priests who bring God’s word to the parish pews today.

King showed the papyrus to a small group of media outlets in the weeks before her announcement—*The Boston Globe*, *The New York Times*, and both *Smithsonian* magazine and the Smithsonian Channel—on the condition that no stories run before her presentation in Rome. *Smithsonian* assigned me a long feature, sending me to see King at Harvard and then to follow her to Rome. I was the only reporter in the room when she revealed her find to colleagues, who reacted with equal parts fascination and disbelief.

Within days, doubts mounted. The Vatican newspaper labeled the papyrus “an inept forgery.” Scholars took to their blogs to point out apparent errors in Coptic grammar as well as phrases that seemed to have been lifted from the Gospel of Thomas. Others deemed the text suspiciously in step

with the zeitgeist of growing religious egalitarianism and of intrigue around the idea, popularized by *The Da Vinci Code*, of a married Jesus. The controversy made news around the world, including an article in these pages.

A year and a half later, however, Harvard announced the results of carbon-dating tests, multispectral imaging, and other lab analyses: The papyrus appeared to be of ancient origin, and the ink had no obviously modern ingredients. This didn’t rule out fraud. A determined forger could obtain a blank scrap of centuries-old papyrus (perhaps even on eBay, where old papyri are routinely auctioned), mix ink from ancient recipes, and fashion passable Coptic script, particularly if he or she had some scholarly training. But the scientific findings complicated the case for forgery. The Gospel of Jesus’s Wife had undergone—and passed—more state-of-the-art lab tests, inch for inch, than almost any other papyrus in history.

But skeptics had identified other problems. Among the most damning was an odd typographical error that appears in both the Jesus’s-wife fragment and an edition of the Gospel of Thomas that was posted online in 2002, suggesting an easily available source for a modern forger’s cut-and-paste job.

With King and her critics at loggerheads, each insisting on the primacy of their evidence, I wondered why no one had conducted a different sort of test: a thorough vetting of the papyrus’s chain of ownership.

King has steadfastly honored the current owner’s request for anonymity. But in 2012, she sent me the text of e-mails she’d exchanged with him, after removing his name and identifying details. His account of how he’d come to possess the fragment, I noticed, contained a series of small inconsistencies. At the time, I wasn’t sure what to make of them. But years later, they still gnawed at me.

The American Association of Museums’ *Guide to Provenance Research* warns that an investigation of an object’s origins “is not unlike detective work”: “One may spend hours, days, or weeks following a trail that leads nowhere.” When I started to dig, however, I uncovered more than I’d ever expected—a warren of secrets and lies that spanned from the industrial districts of Berlin to the swingers scene of southwest Florida, and from the halls of Harvard and the Vatican to the headquarters of the East German Stasi.

THE OWNER of the Jesus’s-wife fragment, whoever he was, had told King a story about where, when, and how he’d acquired it. But the closest thing he had to corroboration was a photocopy of a signed sales contract. The contract recorded his purchase of six Coptic papyri, in November 1999, from a man named Hans-Ulrich Laukamp. The contract said that Laukamp had himself acquired the papyri in Potsdam, in Communist East Germany, in 1963.

The owner also gave King a scan of a photocopy—that is, a copy of a copy—of a 1982 letter to Laukamp from Peter Munro, an Egyptologist at Berlin’s Free University. Munro wrote that a colleague had looked at the papyri and thought one of them bore text from the Gospel of John.





Helga Laukamp had built a single-story stucco house with a swimming pool in the Gulf Coast city of Venice, Florida.

I tracked down people who had known the Laukamps, and they told me that the couple were chain smokers with almost no grasp of English; they were loners in a middle-income enclave of bike-riding “active seniors.” Helga had worked in a laundry, and Hans-Ulrich was a toolmaker who had never finished high school—not the background I was expecting for a manuscript collector.

The Laukamps might never have left their small Berlin apartment were it not for a late-in-life reversal of fortune. In 1995, Laukamp and his friend Axel Herzsprung, a fellow toolmaker, went into business together. The company, ACMB Metallbearbeitung GmbH, or ACMB Metalworking, won a lucrative contract to make brake components for BMW and was soon drawing profits of about \$250,000 a year.

Laukamp, then in his mid-50s, bought a Pontiac Firebird and nudged Herzsprung and his wife to build a vacation home next to his in Florida, where the Laukamps hoped to one day retire. But those dreams evaporated almost as soon as they landed in the Sunshine State. Helga was diagnosed with lung cancer, and Hans-Ulrich took her back to Germany, where she died in December 1999 at the age of 56. The company filed for bankruptcy in August 2002, and Hans-Ulrich died four months later, at 59, after lung cancer metastasized to his brain.

Looking over his company’s public records, I spotted a peculiar detail. Four days after Laukamp’s wife died in a Berlin hospital, his auto-parts company incorporated an American branch, using the address of an office building in Venice, Florida. What’s more, Laukamp and Herzsprung weren’t the American business’s only officers. There was a third man, someone named Walter Fritz, who’d come to Florida from Germany at least four years before the other two and who would soon

The only written reference to the Jesus’s-wife papyrus appeared in yet another scan—of an unsigned, undated, hand-written note. It said that Munro’s colleague believed that “the small fragment ... is the sole example of a text in which Jesus uses direct speech with reference to having a wife,” which “could be evidence for a possible marriage.”

Perhaps conveniently, every player in this story was dead. Peter Munro died in 2009, the colleague he had supposedly consulted about the papyri died in 2006, and Hans-Ulrich Laukamp died in 2002. King thus declared the scrap’s history all but unknowable. “The lack of information regarding the provenance of the discovery is unfortunate,” she wrote in 2014, in an article about the papyrus in the *Harvard Theological Review*, “since, when known, such information is extremely pertinent.”

But was there a lack of information? Or just a lack of investigation? The owner, for one, was still alive and had known Laukamp personally, King told me in 2012. In one e-mail to King, the owner wrote that Laukamp had “brought [his papyri] over when he immigrated to the USA.” That suggested that Laukamp had sold them while living in America.

I searched public documents and found just one American city that had ever been home to a Hans-Ulrich Laukamp. In 1997, a German couple named Hans-Ulrich and

The owner of the papyrus claimed to have bought it from an auto-parts executive named Hans-Ulrich Laukamp (center), who had gone into business with his friend Axel Herzsprung (left). Laukamp had supposedly shown several papyri to an Egyptologist named Peter Munro (right) in 1982.





Before Karen King went public, an anonymous peer reviewer delivered a punishing critique.

strike both men from the corporate documents, leaving him as the sole director of the American branch.

Walter Fritz still lived in Florida, and on paper he looked like an unremarkable local: 50 years old, married, with a single-story house in North Port, 30 minutes east of Venice. If Fritz stood out for anything, it was his civic ardor. He wrote eloquent letters to the editor of the *North Port Sun*. He led neighbors in a successful protest against overhead power lines. He was a regular at the 7:15 breakfasts of the North Port Early Bird Kiwanis Club. And when city commissioners gathered to hash out North Port's annual budget, Fritz—a tall, lean man with chiseled features and dark hair, to judge by a video of the meeting—sat through hours of tedious discussion for a chance to harangue the elected leaders about a proposed recession-year tax hike.

When I ran Fritz's name through a database of Florida incorporations, I found that the auto-parts firm wasn't the only business he had ties to. In 1995, Fritz had founded a company called Nefer Art. *Nefer* is the Egyptian word for "beauty." If someone close to Laukamp had an affinity for Egyptian art, that person was worth talking to: Coptic was an Egyptian language, and nearly all ancient papyri come from Egypt.

I ran *Walter Fritz* and *Egypt* through some search engines, and one hit caught my eye: In 1991, someone named Walter Fritz had published an article in a prestigious German-language journal, *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur*, or *Studies in Ancient Egyptian Culture*. He had used infrared photography to decode textual minutiae on a 3,400-year-old Egyptian tablet. The journal listed his affiliation as the Egyptology institute at Berlin's Free University—the very place that had also employed Peter Munro and his colleague who had supposedly examined Hans-Ulrich Laukamp's papyri in 1982.

I wondered whether the author of the article and the Florida auto-parts executive could possibly be the same man. I called several prominent Egyptologists, who told me that the article—which had reoriented a debate over whether Akhenaten and his father served alone as pharaohs or together as co-regents—remained influential. But none of them—not even the journal's former editors—could recall who Walter Fritz was or what had become of him.

I FLEW TO FLORIDA in November to learn more about Laukamp, but Fritz had come to seem almost as interesting. I planned to knock on his door with some questions. But when I pulled up to Fritz's three-acre lot, my heart sank: The property had no bell or intercom, just a forbidding gate at the end of a driveway that snaked behind a curtain of muscadine vine and Virginia creeper. A twitchy brown dog watched me from beneath a NO TRESPASSING sign. I idled my rental car outside the gate, considered my options, and then drove back to my hotel.

I called Fritz the next morning and told him I was in town working on a story about Laukamp and the Jesus's-wife papyrus. I asked to meet him. He abruptly declined, grew agitated, and made clear he wanted to get off the phone.

He had never studied Egyptology at the Free University, he said. He had never written an article for a German journal. Though the Web site for Laukamp and Herzsprung's business had listed Fritz as the president of its U.S. branch, he told me he was in fact just a consultant who had helped get the company incorporated. He couldn't even recall how he'd met Laukamp.

But when I asked whether Laukamp had been interested in antiquities, Fritz bristled. "He was interested in a lot of things," he said.

Like what?, I asked.

"I know he had a beer-mug collection."

He then alluded, somewhat cryptically, to the question of the papyrus's authenticity. "There will always be people who say yes and people who say no," he told me. "Everybody is up in arms and has an opinion."

I asked him what his opinion was.

"I don't want to comment."

Are you the owner?, I asked.

"No," he said. "Who said that?"

No one, I answered, but since he was one of Laukamp's few American acquaintances, I wanted to be sure.

He wasn't the owner, Fritz insisted. He had no idea who was.

KAREN KING is the first woman to hold Harvard's 295-year-old Hollis Professorship of Divinity, one of the country's loftiest perches in religious studies. The daughter of a pharmacist and a schoolteacher from a Montana cattle town, King enrolled at the University of Montana, where a course on marginalized Christian texts spoke to her in almost personal terms. "I already had this sense of not fitting in," King told me in 2012. "From grade school on, I was the kid who was picked on," she said. "I thought if I could figure out [these texts], then I could figure out what was wrong with me."

She earned a doctorate in the history of religions from Brown in 1984 and by 1991 had become the chair of both religious studies and women's studies at Occidental College. Harvard Divinity School hired her in 1997.

The Jesus's-wife fragment fit neatly with what has become her life's work: resurrecting the diversity of voices in Christianity's formative years. Early Christians were a disputatious bunch, with often conflicting views on the meaning of Jesus's life and teachings. But after Constantine converted the Roman empire to Christianity in the fourth century and Church leaders began canonizing the small selection of texts that form the New Testament, Christians with other views were branded heretics.

King has been particularly interested in non-canonical, or Gnostic, texts that assign Mary Magdalene a prominent role as Jesus's confidante and disciple. Proof that some early Christians also saw Mary Magdalene as Jesus's wife would be a rebuke to Church patriarchs who had discounted her and conflated her, falsely, with two other women mentioned in the Gospels: an unnamed adulteress in John and an unnamed woman—thought to be a prostitute—in Luke.

From the beginning, King was up front about the puzzles the Jesus's-wife scrap posed. Its text spans 14 lines on the front and back, forming incomplete phrases presumably snipped from a larger manuscript. "Jesus said to them, My wife" is the most arresting line, but others are also striking: "She is able to be my disciple"; "I dwell with her."

In our interviews late in the summer of 2012, King said she expected a vigorous debate over the papyrus's meaning. She stressed that the fragment was all but worthless as biography: It was composed centuries after Jesus's death. It showed merely that one group of ancient Christians believed Jesus had been married.

Before going public, King asked some of the world's leading

experts in papyrology and the Coptic language for their take on the fragment: Roger Bagnall, a distinguished papyrologist who directs the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University; AnneMarie Luijendijk, an authority on Coptic handwriting at Princeton who obtained her doctorate under King at Harvard; and Ariel Shisha-Halevy, a Coptic linguist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. All three thought the papyrus looked authentic.

But others weren't convinced. In the summer of 2012, the *Harvard Theological Review* sent King's draft to peer reviewers. One was supportive, but another delivered a punishing critique of the papyrus's grammatical irregularities and handwriting.

I happened to arrive in Cambridge, to interview King, on the afternoon she received word of the unfavorable review. "There was a crisis," she said, apologizing for arriving a little late to our first meeting.

"My first response was shock," she told me over dinner that night. "My second reaction was 'Well, let's get this settled.'" She said that if her own panel of experts agreed with the skeptical reviewer, she would abandon her plans to announce the find in Rome. She knew how high the stakes were, for both history and her own reputation. Some of the world's most prestigious institutions—the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Louvre—had been hoodwinked by forgers, and she didn't want Harvard added to the list. "If it's a forgery," she told *The Boston Globe*, "it's a career breaker."

I was interviewing King in her office the next day when an e-mail from Roger Bagnall popped into her inbox. She lifted her glasses and leaned into the computer screen. Bagnall suggested that she revise her article to address a few of the reviewer's concerns, but he was otherwise unpersuaded.

"Yeah, okay!" King said, clearly buoyed. "Go, Roger!"

It was one of the assurances she needed to move forward.

SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS HAD BEEN HOODWINKED BY FORGERS. KING DIDN'T WANT HARVARD ADDED TO THE LIST.

THE CASE FOR FORGERY, at first confined to lively posts on academic blogs, took a more formal turn last summer, when *New Testament Studies*, a peer-reviewed journal published by the University of Cambridge, devoted an entire issue to the fragment's detractors. In one of the articles, Christopher Jones, a Harvard classicist, noted that a forger may have identified King as a "mark" because of her feminist scholarship. "Either he intended to find a sympathetic person or institution to whom to sell his wares," Jones wrote, "or more diabolically intended his fraud as a bomb, primed to blow up and to discredit such scholarship (or perhaps the institution) when it was exposed."

King never ruled out the possibility of forgery, but she continued to warn against a rush to judgment. More scientific tests were under way, and the similarities with the Gospel of Thomas were hardly incriminating. Ancient scribes often

borrowed language from other texts, King wrote in the *Harvard Theological Review*; the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke—with their overlapping yet “theologically distinctive” narratives—were a case in point.

On a more practical level, she couldn’t see how a con artist cunning enough to produce a scientifically undetectable forgery could at the same time be so clumsy with Coptic handwriting and grammar. “In my judgment,” she wrote, “such a combination of bumbling and sophistication seems extremely unlikely.” The crude writing, she argued, could simply indicate that the ancient scribe was a novice.

Yet “a combination of bumbling and sophistication” could well be the epitaph of many of history’s most infamous forgers, their painstaking precision undone by a few careless oversights.

In the mid-1980s, a master forger from Utah named Mark Hofmann duped experts with manuscripts he claimed to have found that would have upended the official history of the Mormon Church. He used antique paper; made ink from historic recipes; and artificially aged his manuscripts with gelatin, chemical solutions, and a vacuum cleaner. But Hofmann was unmasked after a pipe bomb—which police believe was intended for someone he feared might expose him—blew up in his own car.

Before he was caught, Hofmann made an estimated \$2 million selling his bogus manuscripts. Young, shy, and self-effacing—*The New York Times* called him a “scholarly country bumpkin”—he targeted buyers predisposed, by ideological bent or professional interest, to believe his documents were real. He often expressed doubts about his finds, making experts feel they were discovering signs of authenticity that he himself had somehow missed. “Usually he just leaned back quietly and let his delighted victim do the authentication, adding now and then a quiet, ‘Do you really think it’s genuine?’” Charles Hamilton, once the country’s leading forgery examiner, and one of the many people Hofmann fooled, recalled in a 1996 book.

“ONE DAY [WALTER FRITZ] JUST DISAPPEARED,” ONE WOMAN WROTE. “IS HE STILL ALIVE?”

Reading about Hofmann called to mind the curious e-mails the owner of the Jesus’s-wife papyrus had sent to King. In some messages, the owner comes across as a hapless layman, addressing King as “Mrs.” rather than “Dr.” or “Professor” and claiming that he didn’t read Coptic and was “completely clueless.” In other messages, however, he is far more knowing. He sends King a translation of the Coptic that he says “seems to make sense.” He specifies its dialect (Sahidic) and likely vintage (third to fifth century A.D.), and asks that any carbon dating use “a few fibers only,” to avoid damaging the papyrus. Also strange is that he tells King he acquired the Jesus’s-wife fragment in 1997, then gives her a sales contract dated two years later.

When I called Joe Barabe, a renowned microscopist who has helped expose several infamous fakes, he told me that most forgers try to unload their creations on the unwitting; scholars

are usually the last people they want eyeballing their handiwork. So what kind of forger, I asked, might seek approval from one of the world’s leading historians of early Christianity?

“A pretty gutsy one,” Barabe told me. “You’d have to have a sense of *Can I get away with this?*”

AFTER WALTER FRITZ rebuffed my request to meet in Florida, I called the *North Port Sun* and asked whether its staff had ever photographed him. A friendly reporter e-mailed me an image of Fritz surveying a mulch pile—the paper had covered his long-running crusade against a wood-chipping plant he felt was blighting the neighborhood.

I e-mailed Karl Jansen-Winkeln, a longtime Egyptologist at Berlin’s Free University. Did he by chance know the Walter Fritz who’d written a 1991 article in *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur*?

Jansen-Winkeln replied that he did: Fritz had been a master’s student from about 1988 until about the time the article was published. “He left the university without a final examination,” Jansen-Winkeln wrote. “I have never seen him again after 1992 or 1993.”

That night, I e-mailed Jansen-Winkeln the *North Port Sun* photo. Did this man look anything like the student he’d known two decades earlier?

Jansen-Winkeln’s reply was waiting in my inbox the next morning: “The man looks indeed like Walter Fritz.”

It was the first sign that Fritz might have lied during our phone call. I wondered why a promising student, a young man who’d landed an article in a premier journal early in his studies, would suddenly drop out of his master’s program. I tracked down several people who’d known Fritz at the Free University, but no one had any idea.

“One day he just disappeared,” one woman wrote, in a typical reply. “Is he still alive?”

Judging from public records, Fritz arrived in Florida no later than 1993. In 1995, he incorporated Nefer Art. The company’s Web site advertised a peculiar miscellany of services: wedding photography, “erotic portrait photography,” and “documenting, photographing, publishing, and selling your valuable art collection.”

A page of uncaptioned photographs, titled “Gallery Art,” included a relief of Pharaoh Akhenaten and a pietà, a sculpture of the Virgin Mary cradling the crucified Jesus. Also featured were fragments of two seemingly ancient manuscripts—one in Arabic and another in Greek.

I e-mailed the images of these manuscripts to a few scholars, who found them almost comical. The Greek one, which bore a drawing of a nude woman, superficially resembled texts from Greco-Roman-era Egypt known as “magical papyri.” But the Greek words made little sense, the scholars said, and the script was more or less modern print. “Perhaps not in Times New Roman,” Sofia Torallas Tovar, a papyrologist at the University of Chicago, observed drily, “but in a modern typography.” The drawing of the female figure, meanwhile, was “in a style unparalleled to my knowledge in an ancient document, but easily found in modern school notebooks.”

Two experts in ancient Arabic manuscripts told me that the script on the other fragment was backwards, as if someone had photographed it in a mirror.



What happened next felt almost too easy. I dropped Fritz's name and e-mail address into Google, and up came a link to a site that tracks the history of domain-name registrations. On August 26, 2012—more than three weeks before King announced her discovery to the world, when only her inner circle knew of the papyrus and her name for it—Walter Fritz registered the domain name www.gospelofjesuswife.com.

It was my first piece of hard evidence linking Fritz to the papyrus. In January, I flew to Germany to search for more.

THE TAXI RIDE from Tegel Airport into the heart of Berlin was a blind slog through labyrinths of graffiti-clad apartment blocks, in fog and light snow.

On a cold Sunday afternoon, my interpreter and I showed up unannounced at the apartment of René Ernest, Hans-Ulrich Laukamp's stepson and closest living relative. Ernest and his wife, Gabriele, led us into their small living room and said they were mystified by what they'd heard about Laukamp's supposed ownership of the papyrus.

Laukamp had lived in Potsdam, in Soviet-occupied East Germany, as a child. As a young man, he fled to West Berlin by swimming across the Griebnitzsee, a lake on the border. The Ernests didn't know the exact date of the swim, but Laukamp's immigration papers suggest that it was in October 1961, two months after the Berlin Wall went up, when he was 18 years old. A friend of Laukamp's said he arrived in West Berlin with nothing more than his swimsuit.

The story of Laukamp acquiring six Coptic papyri in Potsdam in 1963 thus seemed to hinge on a dubious scenario: that not long after his illegal escape, he slipped back into East Germany, got the papyri, and then risked his freedom—and possibly his life—in a second illicit crossing to the West.

Another problem was that until Laukamp went into the auto-parts business with Axel

Herzsprung in the mid-1990s, he'd been a humble toolmaker who didn't collect anything—not even beer mugs, the Ernests said, though they acknowledged his fondness for drinking. "If he had ever owned or bought this thing, after his third beer at the pub he would have told everybody about his great coup," Gabriele Ernest told me. "And if I knew my father-in-law, he would have immediately tried to make money from it."

I told the Ernests about the 1982 letter that the fragment's owner had given Karen King—the one in which Peter Munro tells Laukamp that one of his papyri might be a fragment from the Gospel of John. Could they picture Laukamp seeking a consultation with a university Egyptologist?

The Ernests gave each other a look, then burst out laughing. Laukamp had the minimum schooling required by German law, they said—the equivalent of eighth grade. His milieu was the bar on his street that served as his "second living room," not the college campus across town.

(When I reached Peter Munro's ex-wife by phone a couple of days later, she found the story just as preposterous. In 1982, Irmtraut Munro had been learning Coptic and studying papyri while working toward a doctorate in Egyptology. If her then-husband had come across an interesting Coptic papyrus, she said, "he would have told me about it.")

I asked the Ernests how Laukamp's signature might have wound up on the sales contract for the papyri. "He was a person who very easily believed things he was told," Gabriele told me. He was good-hearted, she said, recalling how he brought breakfast to a homeless man in a park where he walked his dog. But he was "simple" and "weak," a man who was easily misled.

When I mentioned the name Walter Fritz, she stiffened. "I can easily imagine Walter Fritz saying, 'I need your signature for the company,'" she said. Laukamp "would have signed that without reading everything."

Walter Fritz (standing left, second from the top) in 1989 with fellow students on the steps of the Free University's Egyptology institute

AS I SPOKE with people around Berlin, a picture of Fritz began to take shape.

When I entered a metal-machining workshop on the outskirts of Berlin one drizzly afternoon, the owner, Peter Biberger, who'd done business with Laukamp's company, answered wordlessly when I asked his opinion of Walter Fritz: He moved his forearm in a slither, like a creature swimming through murk. "He was an eel," Biberger explained. "You couldn't hold him. He slipped through your fingers."

When Fritz turned up at the Free University around 1988, it was in the guise of a man who already had it made. On a campus where student fashions ran to grungy jeans and T-shirts, he often wore elegant dress shirts and blazers. He owned two cars, both Mercedeses.

Fritz's zeal for Egyptology was just as conspicuous. He got a job as a tour guide at Berlin's Egyptian Museum. He backpacked around Egypt; took a class with Munro, the resident expert on Egyptian art; and joked, one classmate recalled, that the randomly assigned letters on his license plate—which mirrored the academic shorthand for a group of Egyptian funerary spells—foretold an illustrious future in the field.

His superiors, however, told me his enthusiasm wasn't always matched by hard work. "Fritz was quite eager and interested in Egyptology, but he was the type who was reluctant to take much effort," Karl Jansen-Winkeln, the professor who identified Fritz in the *North Port Sun* photograph, said when we met for coffee near campus. Jansen-Winkeln, who taught a class that Fritz attended, recalled his Coptic as "not very good."

"He appeared to me like a person who wants to sell you something and not like a person who's really interested in research."

"He paid a lot of attention—how would I say this?—to what other people thought of him," Christian E. Loeben, an Egyptologist who had worked for Munro and considered Fritz a friend, recalled when I visited his office at the August Kestner Museum, in Hannover. "He would wait to see what his counterpart expected," and then turn himself into that person's "little darling."

The arrival of a new department chair in 1989 may have sealed Fritz's fate. Jürgen Osing was a respected scholar of Egyptian languages but a harsh and exacting teacher. In the whole of Osing's career, I'd heard, just three students managed to complete a doctorate under him.

Fritz's 1991 article might have been his ticket to a promising future in Egyptology. He had gotten one of

In 1992, *Stern*, a German magazine, covered Fritz's appointment as the director of a new museum in the former Stasi headquarters in Berlin.

the Amarna letters—clay tablets of correspondence to Egyptian pharaohs from rulers in the Near East—shuttled from a museum of Near Eastern history in the former East Berlin to the Egyptian Museum, which had the facilities for a more sophisticated photographic study of its partly legible text.

"There was a little problem," Jansen-Winkeln told me: The article angered Osing. "Fritz went to the museum to copy the Amarna letter and make a photograph, but many of the conclusions he reached in the paper were what he had heard in Osing's Egyptian-history class." Fritz did thank Osing in the article's first footnote, and cited him twice more. But Jansen-Winkeln says the article's key findings "were not [Fritz's] ideas."

Reached by phone in December, Osing recalled almost nothing about Fritz or his article. What he and everyone else agreed on, however, was that soon after Fritz's paper was published, he vanished from campus. None of them ever heard from him again.

MY TRAIL MIGHT HAVE gone cold there if not for a hazy memory: Two of Fritz's acquaintances recalled him materializing briefly in the early 1990s as the head of some new museum of East German history.

This rumor had always baffled them—Fritz had no training in the subject. When I pressed for details, a former classmate recalled that a blurb about Fritz's appointment had appeared in *Stern*, a major German magazine.

After I returned from Berlin to my home in Washington, D.C., I asked the Library of Congress to pull every issue of *Stern* from 1991 to 1994. After an hour of page-flipping, I found it. In the February 27, 1992, issue, sandwiched between notices about celebrities like Glenn Close and La Toya Jackson, was a photo of Fritz, in a tie and three-button blazer, standing beside a painting of Erich Mielke, the dreaded chief of the Stasi, the East German secret police.

"Walter Fritz, 27, antiquities scholar, is the successor of Erich Mielke—at his desk in the former East Berlin Stasi headquarters," the notice began. He wasn't Mielke's actual successor, the article made clear, but the head of a new museum in the former Stasi headquarters.

When my interpreter called Jörg Drieselmann, the longtime director of the Stasi Museum, he remembered Fritz well. In 1990, soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall, East German activists had seized the Stasi compound, to prevent former Stasi officials from



destroying their intelligence files. The activists wanted the building preserved as a research center, museum, and memorial.

Fritz applied for the job of museum director. “Nobody from the group knew him,” Drieselmann, who was a co-leader of the activists, said. But Fritz made a convincing case: “He had come from the Egyptian Museum in West Berlin, so he was experienced in museum work.”

When asked whether the activists had known that Fritz’s museum experience consisted of giving tours, Drieselmann said they may not have probed that deeply. The mere fact that he was a “Wessi”—a West German—made him a “fascination” to the East Berliners who hired him in October 1991.

Drieselmann said that Fritz excelled at self-promotion but was less impressive as an administrator. In March 1992, five months into the job, the museum’s board members ordered him to shape up. They were concerned, among other things, about valuables—paintings, Nazi military medals, Stasi memorabilia—that had gone missing from the building’s storage during Fritz’s tenure. Drieselmann confronted him about his job performance in the spring of 1992. Not long after, Fritz disappeared, leaving behind a resignation letter.

“I don’t want to raise allegations, but it is possible that a West German knew much better than us inexperienced East Germans that these [objects] were easy to sell—and worthwhile selling,” said Drieselmann, who replaced Fritz in 1992 and has led the museum ever since. He said that there was never an investigation into whether Fritz misappropriated anything, and that none of his suspicions were ever proved.

F RITZ’S CAREER CHANGE from Egyptology student to Stasi Museum chief was unusual. But his reappearance as an auto-parts executive a few years later was stranger still.

During my trip to Germany in January, my interpreter and I rode the subway to Haselhorst, a drab industrial quarter on Berlin’s western border. We entered Herzsprung Drehteile GmbH, a metal-parts factory, and knocked on the door of the chief executive, Axel Herzsprung—the toolmaker who’d been Laukamp’s friend and business partner. A potbellied man with a wry air, Herzsprung seemed unruffled by our unannounced visit.

In my brief phone chat with Fritz, he’d said he couldn’t recall how he and Laukamp had met. Herzsprung’s memory was clearer. “They met in a sauna,” he said. Sometime between 1992 and 1995, he said, Fritz had struck up a conversation with Laukamp, who was 22 years his senior, in the steam room of a Berlin fitness center they both frequented.

How did a stranger in a sauna become a top executive of their auto-parts company?, I asked. “He snuck in,” Herzsprung said, bitterness edging his voice. “He was very eloquent. Laukamp was easily influenced—he didn’t have a very high IQ—and Fritz was successful in talking his way in.”

Herzsprung made no effort to hide his hatred of Fritz. “I was so angry at him that I thought it was better we never meet in the dark somewhere,” he told me. Each blames the other for the company’s 2002 bankruptcy: During my phone call with Fritz, he accused Herzsprung of embezzlement; Herzsprung, meanwhile, accused Fritz of a Machiavellian plot to take over the business by driving a wedge between Herzsprung and Laukamp. As the company imploded, Fritz—who split his time between

Florida and Germany—persuaded BMW to let him take its contract to a different business in Berlin, APG Automotive Parts.

When I found APG’s owner at home one evening in a working-class fringe of Berlin, he told me that the business had thrived for a few years. It drew annual profits of some \$250,000, thanks in part to Fritz’s sales talent and the BMW work he’d brought with him. But APG began dissolution proceedings in February 2008, after a former employee broke into its warehouse, the owner said, and destroyed the main machine that made brake parts.

Two months later, Fritz tried to sell his North Port house, to no avail. In February 2010, he listed it again, lowering the asking price by more than a third, from \$349,000 to \$229,900. On July 8, 2010, the house still unsold, Fritz had an angry letter published in the *North Port Sun*, demanding layoffs and 35 percent salary reductions for highly paid city staffers—it was the right thing to do, he argued, given the pay cuts and joblessness people in the business world were facing.

The next day, Karen King received her first e-mail from a man claiming to have an interesting set of Coptic papyrus fragments.

B Y EVERY INDICATION, Fritz had the skills and knowledge to forge the Jesus’s-wife papyrus. He was the missing link between all the players in the provenance story. He’d proved adept at deciphering enigmatic Egyptian text. He had a salesman’s silver tongue, which kept Laukamp and possibly others in his thrall. Perhaps most important, he’d studied Coptic but had never been very good at it—which could explain the “combination of bumbling and sophistication” that King had deemed “extremely unlikely” in a forger.

But if Fritz did do it, what was his motive?

Money drives many forgers, and by 2010 Fritz’s assets certainly appear to have taken a beating. The owner of the papyrus agreed to loan it to Harvard for 10 years, but that’s hardly exculpatory: An Ivy League imprimatur could produce a kind of halo effect, giving a forger cover to sell other fakes with less scrutiny.

But there was another possibility. If Fritz had seen his Egyptology dreams thwarted, maybe he nursed a grudge against the elite scholars who had failed to appreciate his intellectual gifts—who had told him he was mediocre at Coptic and short on original ideas. Not a few forgers over the decades have been driven by a desire to show up the experts.

Or maybe even this theory was too simple. Curious whether Fritz owned any domain names besides gospelofjesuswife.com, I ran a search of Web registrations. When the results came back, I felt as if I’d fallen down a rabbit hole.

Beginning in 2003, Fritz had launched a series of pornographic sites that showcased his wife having sex with other men—often more than one at a time. One home page billed her as “America’s #1 Slut Wife.” The couple advertised the dates and locations of “gangbangs” and asked interested men to e-mail “Walt” a photo and phone number, so he could clear them to attend. There was no charge, but the men had to agree to Walt’s filming.

“I just wanted to thank you for a wonderful time during the gangbang on Friday,” someone named Doug was quoted as saying on the fan-mail page of one of the sites. “Don’t get me wrong Walt you are a great guy, but [your wife] ... Wow!!!”

All of the sites seem to have been taken down in late 2014 and early 2015. But archived pages and free images and videos were easy to find online. In an interview on a German-language Web site, Fritz's wife, under her porn name, described herself as the daughter of a U.S. military officer who had been stationed in Berlin when she was a teenager. She and Fritz met in Florida in the 1990s, and he encouraged her to act out their shared fantasies of her having sex with other men.

Fritz appears in a few videos, but he is more often behind the camera. He included a bio on one site, under his occasional porn name, Wolf: "I am a 45 year old executive, living in S. Florida. Stats: 6'2", 185 lbs., brown hair, slim, no belly, clean cut, and well endowed." Then he went on to list his academic credentials, as if for a LinkedIn profile: "I am college-educated with a technical MA-degree form [sic] a major university, and an associate degree in arts. I speak three languages fluently and read two old languages."

FRITZ'S WEB SITES BELONGED
TO A FETISH GENRE BUILT AROUND
FANTASIES OF CUCKOLDED
HUSBANDS POWERLESS TO STOP
THEIR WIVES' LUST.

This juxtaposition of lewd and learned appears in still sharper relief on one of his wife's sites, where passages from Goethe, Proust, and Edna St. Vincent Millay are interspersed with philosophical musings on Jesus's teachings, the slippery nature of reality, and "the Perfection of Sluthood."

After trawling regions of the Web I hadn't even known existed, I discovered that Fritz's wife, under her porn name, enjoyed a measure of fame. Before Yahoo shut it down in 2004, she boasted online, her "Femalebarebackgangbangextreme" discussion group had nearly 50,000 members. The couple's work belonged to a fetish genre built around fantasies of cuckolded husbands powerless to stop their wives' lust for other men. The genre is called "hotwife."

WHEN I MENTIONED these findings to my own wife, she told me to read *The Da Vinci Code*. Studied closely, she said, the book could be a Rosetta stone for Fritz's motives.

Dan Brown's best seller is fiction, of course, but it draws on the work of feminist religious scholars like King. Its premise is that conservative forces in the Roman Catholic Church silenced early Christians who saw sex as holy and women as the equals—or even the saviors—of men. Threatened by these vestiges of pagan goddess worship, Church fathers defamed Mary Magdalene and enshrined the all-male priesthood to keep women out.

Brown's chief point of departure from scholars like King is his made-for-Hollywood plot, which turns on a Catholic conspiracy to destroy evidence of Jesus's marriage to—and child with—Mary Magdalene. A clandestine society whose past members include Leonardo da Vinci and Sir Isaac Newton has resolved to keep alive the secret of Jesus's marriage, along with an ancient practice that celebrated the sanctity of sexual

intercourse. In a pivotal scene, members of the society take part in a ritualistic orgy.

"For the early Church, mankind's use of sex to commune directly with God posed a serious threat to the Catholic power base," the book's protagonist, Robert Langdon, explains. "For obvious reasons, they worked hard to demonize sex and recast it as a disgusting and sinful act."

I wondered whether Fritz and his wife had seen in the book a way to sanctify their adventurous sex life, to cloak it in the garb of faith. The couple launched their first porn site in April 2003, a month after *The Da Vinci Code* was published. Perhaps they had spun a fantasy of Fritz—whose birthday happens to be Christmas—as a kind of Jesus figure, and his wife as a latter-day Mary Magdalene.

In 2015, Fritz's wife self-published a book of "universal truths" that she claims is a product of divinely inspired "automatic writing." God and the archangel Michael, she says, speak through her. The dates on its diarylike entries overlap with the papyrus owner's e-mail courtship of King. "Knowledge as you know, is what brings forth the fortune," she wrote in the penultimate entry, dated August 29, 2012, less than three weeks before King's announcement in Rome. "For all the Bibles and all the churches in the entire world, cannot give you what you can give to yourself."

Could Fritz and his wife have convinced themselves that a higher being was guiding his hands, too? To turn a *Da Vinci Code* fantasy into reality, all you needed was material proof of Jesus's marriage, and a real-life Robert Langdon. In the book, Langdon—a Harvard professor of "religious symbology"—finds the modern descendants of Jesus and Mary Magdalene's daughter thanks to a cryptic message on a scrap of papyrus. Perhaps Fritz and his wife had found their Langdon in Karen King.

NEARLY FOUR MONTHS had passed since I'd first spoken with Walter Fritz. The time had come to call him again.

When he answered, on a Monday morning in March, I laid out what I'd discovered: his training in Egyptology, his ties to the Free University, the fact that he'd registered gospelofjesuswife.com weeks before King's announcement.

"So what is it you want to know?" he asked.

The truth about the papyrus, I said. All the evidence pointed to him as the owner.

"Maybe I know the person who owns it," he said. He claimed the papyrus's owner was a friend whose identity he was not at liberty to disclose. When I asked him whether he'd had any contact with Karen King, he said he had never met her but had talked with her briefly "just to clarify something."

I mentioned the allegations of forgery.

"No owner has ever claimed this is real," he said of the papyrus. He was right: In the e-mails to King, the owner never said he had an authentic piece of antiquity. He wanted King's opinion about that very question, and in the end she and the experts she consulted could find no signs of fabrication.

Fritz also confirmed something else people I'd met in Germany had told me: that he had obtained a technical degree in architecture in Berlin and kept a drawing board in his

apartment. That is, he not only had studied Egyptology, but could draw—a skill that might help someone convincingly mimic ancient script. With that background, I said, he must have expected questions about his role in a possible forgery, whether he was the owner or not.

“Let’s be the devil’s advocate and say either Mr. Laukamp or I conspired to forge a papyrus to make a statement,” he said when we spoke again later that week. “Well, there is still no scientific evidence at this point that we did it.”

But could he have pulled off a near-perfect forgery if he’d wanted to?

“Well, to a certain degree, probably,” he said. “But to a degree that it is absolutely undetectable to the newest scientific methods, I don’t know.”

I didn’t understand these hedges, so I asked point-blank whether he had forged the Gospel of Jesus’s Wife. His response was unequivocal: “No.”

Fritz denied having money problems at the time he contacted Karen King. He also disputed the idea that he’d had trouble at the Free University or the Stasi Museum. Though he acknowledged that some items had gone missing from the museum during his tenure, he said so many people had had access to the building that he had been powerless to intervene. He said he’d resigned because he’d realized that an East German would be better suited for the job. He e-mailed me a photo of a short but adulatory 1992 reference letter from Jörg Drieselmann. (Drieselmann couldn’t recall writing the letter but said it was possible he had.)

As for the Free University’s Egyptology program, Fritz told me he’d quit because fields like real estate and business offered better job prospects. All the same, memories of his university years clearly rankled. He denied ever butting heads with Osing, but called him an “asshole” who seemed to take a perverse pleasure in humiliating students. He described the department as rife with backstabbers, and dismissed the entire field of Egyptology as a “pseudoscience.”

He had even more scorn for critics of the Jesus’s-wife papyrus, deriding them as “county level” scholars from the “University of Eastern Pee-Pee Land” who think their nitpicking of Coptic phrases can compete with scientific tests at places like Columbia University and MIT that have yielded no physical proof of forgery.

F RITZ TOLD ME to call again in two weeks, and when I did, he said to check my inbox for an e-mailed statement. It read:

Dear Mr. Sabar:

I, Walter Fritz, herewith certify that I am the sole owner of a papyrus fragment ... which was named “Gospel of Jesus’s Wife” ...

I warrant that neither I, nor any third parties have forged, altered, or manipulated the fragment and/or its inscription in any way since it was acquired by me. The previous owner gave no indications that the fragment was tampered with either.

Over the next four and a half hours, Fritz told me the following story: He had first met Hans-Ulrich Laukamp in Berlin in the early 1990s, at a talk by the best-selling Swiss author Erich von Däniken, who’d become famous in the late 1960s

TOOLS

Wheels sigh with longing for the horizon.

Hunger moans in the spoon’s hollow belly.

Tools recount the needs from which they arose
and so comprise a history of human desire.

The match recalls fear in the fireless night,
the saw’s oiled teeth plead for perfect order,
the pen cannot imagine life without ink.

Even that technology employed by the soul
in its perilous escape from the prison of the body
is exhibited here, in these letters, in words.

— Campbell McGrath

*Campbell McGrath’s new book of poems is
XX: Poems for the Twentieth Century (2016).*

for his theory that space aliens—or “ancient astronauts”—helped build the pyramids, Stonehenge, and other landmarks that seemed beyond the capacities of “primitive” man. Fritz said he struck up a conversation with Laukamp afterward—Laukamp bought von Däniken’s theories; Fritz didn’t—and continued it over beers at a pub across the street. He said Laukamp liked to sit in on classes at the Free University, and they had lunch together there. They did occasionally go to a sauna, he said, but that was after the von Däniken talk.

Fritz said Laukamp first told him about his papyrus collection in Berlin in the mid-1990s. Then, in Florida, in November 1999, Laukamp sold him the half-dozen fragments, for \$1,500. Fritz photographed the papyri, conserved them between plexiglass, and placed them in a safe-deposit box, where they remained untouched for a decade.

In 2009, Fritz said, he was in London on a business trip when he stopped by the shop of an art dealer he knew. Fritz told the dealer he had some papyri to sell, and the dealer invited him to e-mail photos.

Fritz said he would have been happy to get about \$5,000 for the Jesus’s-wife fragment, but three months later, the dealer called and offered him some \$50,000. Fritz e-mailed King, whose books and articles he had read: He wanted her to give him a sense of why a dealer would offer so much. But when the dealer heard that Fritz had approached an expert, he angrily cut off negotiations. In December 2011, Fritz traveled to Harvard to deliver the papyrus to King.

The story had an airtight logic. But it was nearly impervious to verification. In his original e-mails to King, Fritz had claimed that “someone in Germany” had translated the Jesus’s-wife fragment in the 1980s, and that a Coptic priest had “recently” translated another of Laukamp’s papyri. I would have liked to speak with either of them, but when I asked who they were, Fritz confessed that he’d in fact translated the fragments himself,

using a Coptic dictionary and grammar book from his university days. He lied to King about it, he said, because he didn't want to be "embarrassed" if his Coptic skills had grown rusty.

I asked Fritz whether there was anyone alive who could vouch for any part of the provenance story—the London art dealer, someone who had known Laukamp to collect papyri, or anyone who had seen Fritz with Laukamp at the von Däniken talk or at the Free University.

Did he have a single corroborating source to whom he could refer me?

"I don't," he said. "It's very unfortunate."

I CALLED KAREN KING later that day to ask whether we could meet. I wanted her perspective on what I'd found and was curious about how much she already knew. I wondered, too, whether any of it would color her view of the papyrus's authenticity.

But King wasn't interested in talking. "I haven't engaged the provenance questions at all," she said. What she did know, she'd already reported in her 2014 *Harvard Theological Review* article. "It's all out there," she said. "I don't see the point of a conversation."

I told her I'd spent months reporting in Germany and the United States. Didn't she want to know what I'd found?

"Not particularly," she said. She would read my piece once it was published. What interested her more were the results of new ink tests being done at Columbia.

Fritz told me he'd mentioned to King that we'd spoken. Before she cut short our call, I asked her why he'd never provided originals of his provenance papers—the 1982 Munro letter, the 1999 sales contract, the unsigned note that seemed to refer to the Jesus's-wife papyrus. "You're in contact with Walt Fritz," she said. "Why not ask him?"

All right, I thought.

But why hadn't she at least released her copies of Fritz's papers, as many scholars had requested?, I asked.

"I don't think they're good data," she said. Nothing useful could be gleaned from a scan of a photocopy, which was, after all, just "an image of an image."

I wasn't so sure.

Forensic specialists had told me early on that anyone with the technical skill to fake an ancient Coptic papyrus would have no trouble concocting modern-day provenance papers. But after reading a short history of manuscript forgery by Christopher Jones, the Harvard classicist, in last July's *New Testament Studies*, I wondered whether they'd gotten it backwards. "Perhaps the hardest thing of all to forge is provenance," Jones wrote. A manuscript is a physical object; to convincingly fake one, all you need are the right tools and materials. Provenance,

however, is historical fact: a trail of dates, places, buyers, sellers. To convincingly fake provenance, you need to rewrite history—often recent history.

Fritz's contract for the purchase of Laukamp's papyri was dated November 12, 1999. When I asked Fritz where the sale had taken place, he said it was in the kitchen of Laukamp's home in Florida. But Helga Laukamp's son and daughter-in-law, the Ernests, had told me that Laukamp was at his dying wife's bedside at that time. He had brought Helga back to Germany no later than October 1999, the Ernests said, after a Florida doctor diagnosed her terminal lung cancer. She died



Walter Fritz
in Sarasota,
Florida,
this spring

there two months later, in December, and Laukamp hadn't left her side, much less Europe. Laukamp "spent every day at her hospital bed" at the Heckschnorn Lung Clinic, in Berlin, Gabriele Ernest told me.

Later, at my request, Fritz e-mailed me a photo of his copy of Peter Munro's 1982 letter, about Laukamp's Gospel of John fragment. When I forwarded it to a close colleague of Munro's, he wrote back that the signature and stationery looked "100% authentic."

But later, I noticed two errors in the street address for Laukamp's Berlin apartment. Not only are the building number and postal code incorrect, but no such address existed. The letter, it seemed, warranted a closer look.

On the advice of a forensic document examiner, I sought as many of Munro's letters from the early 1980s through the

mid-1990s as I could. Soon, scans were arriving by e-mail from a former doctoral student; a Dutch Egyptologist who has custody of Munro's archives; a Free University professor; and the same Munro colleague who initially thought the letter looked genuine—a position he quickly backed away from after seeing other Munro letters.

The problems were endemic. A word that should have been typed with a special German character—a so-called sharp S, which Munro used in typewritten correspondence throughout the '80s and early '90s—was instead rendered with two ordinary S's, a sign that the letter may have been composed on a non-German typewriter or after Germany's 1996 spelling reform, or both.

In fact, all the available evidence suggests that the 1982 letter isn't from the 1980s. Its Courier typeface does not appear in the other Munro correspondence I gathered until the early '90s—Fritz's final years at the university. The same is true of the letterhead. The school's Egyptology institute began using it only around April 1990.

As a student of Munro's, Fritz may well have received correspondence from the professor—a letter of recommendation, for example, or a note certifying that he'd completed a course. It would not be difficult, the forensic examiner told me, to take an authentic letter, lay a sheet of new typewritten text across its middle, and make a photocopy. This might explain why Munro's typewritten name at the bottom of the letter is parallel with the stationery's design elements, while the rest of the text sits slightly askew. It might also explain why no original exists.

When I asked Fritz for explanations, he did some hemming and hawing but never sounded rattled. As for the date on the sales contract, he said Laukamp had returned to America—perhaps twice—after taking his terminally ill wife back to Germany. “She wasn't dying quite at that moment,” he said, explaining why a man he'd previously described as devastated by his wife's diagnosis might have abandoned her on her deathbed. Fritz said he sometimes handled travel arrangements for Laukamp, and might even have records to send me as proof. I never received any.

When I brought up the 1982 Munro letter, Fritz cut me off. “I can't comment on any issues you have with that letter.” He said he did not alter it in any way. “I received a photocopy from somebody, and that's the end of the story.”

I persisted, going over the evidence point by point. Fritz told me that if the Munro letter was indeed a fake, the forger would have had “no clue” as to what he was doing. He emphatically excluded himself from the clueless category: “I've always known where he lived,” he said of Laukamp. But he hadn't noticed any of the problems, including the mistakes in Laukamp's address, before I pointed them out.

I MET WALTER FRITZ in person for the first time on a sunny, windswept Saturday in April, in Sarasota, Florida. After several days of long phone interviews, he'd agreed to have lunch and then be photographed for this magazine. He recommended we meet in St. Armands Circle, a shopping and dining hub popular with tourists, a 45-minute drive from his home.

I was looking over a restaurant's outdoor menu board when Fritz broke through a swarm of tank-topped beachgoers. He had tightly cropped dark hair and wore a beige linen suit with a pocket square, tan wing tips, and aviator sunglasses. Fritz's usual ride is a black Harley-Davidson Road King, he told me. But today he'd come in his Dodge Ram pickup, not wanting to muss his clothes for the camera.

Over lunch, he said he admired King's tenacity: She had held her ground in the face of relentless hostility and skepticism about the papyrus, at no small risk to her reputation. But he felt she'd made a cascade of strategic blunders that had exposed his papyrus to undue scrutiny and animus.

“THE ANGELS ASKED ME TO,”
FRITZ'S WIFE SAID OF HER
DECISION TO PUBLISH A BOOK.

Among those missteps, he said, was her sensational title for it; her decision to announce it just steps from the Vatican; and her mention, in her *Harvard Theological Review* article, of the 1982 Munro letter, which—if found “fishy”—could be used to tarnish the papyrus.

“If you know you are going into a confrontation, you just don't provide ammunition to the other side,” he explained of his preference for less disclosure. Though King's approach was perhaps “the most honest thing to do, it just wasn't very smart.”

Smart for whom?, I wondered. And why was honest the enemy of smart?

As for the porn, Fritz told me that he and his wife (whom he asked me not to name in this article) had at one point drawn about a third of their income from the \$24.99 monthly memberships to their Web sites. But they took the sites down a couple of years ago in part because the business had started to take the fun out of the sex. He'd seen the movie adaptation of *The Da Vinci Code*, he said, but there were no links between their “hotwife” fetish, his wife's automatic writing, and the papyrus. “Probably highly coincidental,” he said.

Later, his wife told me on the phone that she was clairvoyant and had channeled the voices of angels since she was 17. But she felt no kinship with the Jesus's-wife papyrus or *The Da Vinci Code*'s story, and there was no special reason for the timing of the entries in her book of “universal truths.”

“The angels asked me to,” she said of her decision to publish it. “I'm here to do God's service. If he wants me to write a book, then I'll write a book.”

At one point, Fritz said he needed to disclose something: When he was a 9-year-old boy being raised by a single mother in a small town in southern Germany, a Catholic priest had gotten him drunk on sacramental wine and raped him in a room next to the altar. In April 2010, he wrote a letter about the episode to Pope Benedict XVI, a fellow southern German, whom Fritz felt was doing too little to address the legacy of sexual abuse by members of the clergy. Fritz sent me digital images of consoling letters he said he'd received from three Catholic officials—replies that left him unsatisfied.

Fritz described the effects of the abuse as less spiritual than

psychological: his struggles with anger, his combativeness, his contempt for people he saw as intellectually inferior. He said he feared that if he didn't tell me about his letter, someone, perhaps at the Vatican, would leak word of it to insinuate yet another motive for forgery. He insisted that the abuse and the timing of his letter to Benedict—a few months before he contacted King—were unconnected to the papyrus.

I hated to question anyone's account of sexual abuse, but after everything I'd learned about Fritz, I didn't know whether to believe him. A few years earlier, I'd written a long profile of a man who'd been molested by a priest in a small Italian town and later became a hero to the community of abuse survivors. I wondered whether Fritz had read the article and seen an opening to my sympathies—or even to public sympathy. But I discovered that he'd reported the incident long before we met. A Vatican official confirmed that a high-level prelate had written to Fritz “on behalf of the Holy Father,” responding to his “sad story.” Church officials in southern Germany said they had a record of Fritz's allegations but knew of no other complaints against the priest, who died in 1980.

One thing did become clear, though. When we first started talking, Fritz had claimed that he had no stake in the papyrus's message. But I began to see that he in fact cared deeply. As a teenager he wanted to become a priest, he said, but he later came to believe that much of Catholic teaching was “bullcrap.” Particularly flawed was the Church's claim that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were truer accounts of Jesus's life than the Gnostic Gospels.

FRITZ LEANED ACROSS THE TABLE. HE HAD A PROPOSITION FOR ME.

He pointed to the fact that almost no papyri bearing the canonical Gospels have been carbon-dated, because such testing would cause physical damage to the New Testament's seminal manuscripts—damage that institutions like the Vatican Library would never countenance. But with the new ink tests at Columbia—the ones King had told me about—scientists can date papyri without damaging them. Fritz said these tests could well show that most of the Gnostic Gospels were written *before* the canonical Gospels, making them better witnesses to the historical Jesus—a view that virtually no serious scholars share.

“All that discussion that the canonical Gospels were way before anything else—that's utter bullshit,” Fritz told me. “The Gnostic texts that allow women a discipleship and see Jesus more as a spiritual person and not as a demigod—these texts are probably the more relevant ones.”

Fritz had also told me at first that he didn't believe in his wife's spiritual channeling, but later he described her as strangely prophetic about everything from people's motivations to imminent traffic accidents. She's normally a terrible speller, he said, but her automatic writing is almost letter-perfect: “Something must be going on.” He said his wife sometimes lapsed, unaccountably, into a language he suspected was Aramaic, the tongue of Jesus. “We tried to record it. It goes on for 20 or 30 seconds.”

I asked when he had first heard her speak in this mysterious language.

“During sex,” he said.

AFTER THE WAITRESS cleared our lunch plates, Fritz leaned across the table and told me to shut off my tape recorder. I obliged, but continued taking notes. He wanted to keep this next part between the two of us, but I didn't agree, and he went on anyway.

He had a proposition. He had no talent for storytelling, he said, but he possessed the erudition to produce hundreds of pages of background material for a book—a thriller—that he wanted me to write. Instead of doing my own research, which could take years, I should rely on his. “I'd do all the legwork for you, and I wouldn't want anything in return.”

The book's subject, he said, would be “the Mary Magdalene story,” the “suppression of the female element” in the Church, and the primacy of the Gnostic Gospels, “maybe accumulating to a thriller story in the present.”

It sounded an awful lot like *The Da Vinci Code*.

“People don't want to read Karen King's book” on Gnosticism, or the books of other academics, because they're too dense, he said. “People want something they can take to bed. The facts alone, they don't really matter. What matters is entertainment.”

The book, he assured me, would be a runaway best seller: “A million copies in the first month or so.” Our collaboration, he said, “could really make a big difference.” But he insisted on the need for fabrication. “You have to make a lot of stuff up,” he said. “You cannot just present facts.”

“The truth is not absolute,” he explained. “The truth depends on perspectives, surroundings.”

I let him go on for a while, but I was stupefied. I was reporting a story about a possible forgery, and the man at its center was asking me to “make a lot of stuff up” for a new project in which he'd be my eager partner. It was a proposal so tone-deaf that either he was clueless, incorrigible—or up to something I couldn't quite yet discern.

I reminded him that I was a journalist; I wrote fact, not fiction. Nor could I accept favors from the subject of a story. But I was curious: What role would the Walter Fritz character play in this hypothetical book, whose underlying ideas, after all, would be entirely his? He gave me a quizzical look. “I wouldn't have a role in it,” he said.

He wanted, that is, to be the invisible hand.

As I walked back to my car, I realized with something like a shudder that Fritz had hoped to lure me into a trap from which my reputation might never recover. I knew enough about his dealings with King and Laukamp to recognize all the signs: the request for secrecy, the strategic self-effacement, the use of other people for his own enigmatic ends.

Fame and fortune would rain down on me, he'd promised. All I had to do was lower my guard and trust him with all the important details. 

Ariel Sabar is a journalist and the author of My Father's Paradise, which won a National Book Critics Circle Award. Petra Krischok served as a German interpreter for this article and contributed reporting in Berlin.

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THE WHITE STRATEGY

An embrace of white nativism in the 1990s turned California's Republican Party into a permanent minority. The same story may now be repeating itself for the GOP nationally.

BY PETER BEINART

PHOTOGRAPH BY GREGORY REID

WHEN IT COMES TO Latinos, Donald Trump has a muse: Ann Coulter. Last June, when Trump called Mexican immigrants “rapists” in his presidential-campaign announcement, the comment took many journalists by surprise. But that’s because many journalists hadn’t read Coulter’s work. Her book *Adios, America: The Left’s Plan to Turn Our Country Into a Third World Hellhole*, which hit bookstores two weeks before Trump entered the race, is packed with statements about “Latin American rape culture” and “the gusto for gang rape, incest and child rape of our main immigrant groups.” On page 191 Coulter writes, “The rape of little girls isn’t even considered a crime in Latino culture.” On page 173 she warns, “Another few years of our current immigration policies, and we’ll all have to move to Canada to escape the rapes.” Before announcing his presidential run, Trump called *Adios, America* a “great read.” Since Trump began his campaign, Coulter has occasionally warmed up crowds at his rallies.

Given Coulter’s role in Trump’s crusade against Mexican immigration, it’s worth examining her book for clues to that crusade’s future. In particular, it’s worth examining what she says about California.

In *Adios, America*’s acknowledgments section, Coulter notes that many of the people who helped her with the book hail from that state:

Ned, Jim, Trish, Robert, Melanie, and Merrill are all Californians, so they have a closeup view of what our new country is going to be like. In fact, nearly all my friends who were willing to be named are Californians. It’s remarkable how quickly people in a state that has been overwhelmed with illegal aliens are able to grasp the fine points of my thesis. If it’s not a hit in 2015, this book will be HUGE as soon as the other forty-nine states become California.

Coulter is right. California, where Latinos now outnumber non-Latino whites, offers valuable lessons about what American politics will be like as the share of Latinos grows in the country as a whole. But those lessons suggest that the Trump insurrection will fail miserably. If the Golden State is any guide, the Trump campaign does not herald the beginning of a mass nativist backlash against Latino immigration. It heralds something closer to the end.

ALTHOUGH TRUMP has broken with his party's establishment on many issues, immigration has been the most central to his rise. His "rapists" comment dominated media coverage of his campaign launch, and his pledge to build a wall along the Mexican border is, by far, his best-known policy proposal. When his events grow "a little boring," the real-estate mogul told *The New York Times*' editorial board, "I just say, 'We will build the wall!' and they go nuts." According to a Pew Research Center poll this spring, the wall divides pro-Trump from anti-Trump Republicans more sharply than any other issue.

But Trump is not the first Republican to put illegal immigration at the heart of his presidential bid. Pete Wilson did it 20 years ago. On a late-summer day in 1995, with the Statue of Liberty as his backdrop, the then-governor of California declared that he was entering the presidential race because "there's a right way to come to America and a wrong way. Illegal immigration is not the American way. We teach our children to respect the law, but nearly 4 million illegal immigrants in our country break it every day, and Washington—Washington actually rewards these lawbreakers by forcing states to give them benefits paid for by the taxpayers. That's like giving free room service to someone who breaks into a hotel."

The reference to free room service was a nod to Proposition 187, a California ballot initiative Wilson had successfully championed the year before, which denied undocumented immigrants public education, nonemergency health care, and other government services. It was the beginning of a ferocious reaction to Latino immigration in the Golden State. In 1995, Elton Gallegly, a Republican congressman from

California and the chair of a House task force on immigration reform, recommended an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to deny automatic citizenship to the children of undocumented immigrants. In 1996, California voters passed Proposition 209, which prohibited public universities and other state institutions from giving preference to racial and ethnic minorities. In 1998, Californians passed Proposition 227, which curtailed bilingual education.

From 1994 to 1998, in other words, California Republicans rebelled against Latino immigration in many of the ways Ann Coulter now hopes America as a whole will. What has happened since is instructive.

When Wilson announced his presidential campaign, California was a Republican-leaning state. Between the end of World War II and the end of the Cold War, it had gone to the Republican presidential candidate nine out of 11 times and elected a Republican governor seven out of 11 times. Republicans controlled the governor's mansion, the state assembly, and a majority of statewide elected offices. And while the state's growing Latino population posed a challenge to GOP dominance, Latinos had shown themselves willing to vote Republican in substantial numbers. According to exit polls, Ronald Reagan won 44 percent of California Latinos in 1984. Republican Governor George Deukmejian won 46 percent in 1986. Pete Wilson himself won 47 percent in 1990. During the Reagan and

George H. W. Bush years, according to a study by the political scientists Shaun Bowler, Stephen P. Nicholson, and Gary M. Segura, "Latinos in California had been drifting toward the GOP."

But all of that changed after the GOP began targeting Latino immigrants. Feeling themselves under assault, California Latinos registered to vote in epic numbers. From 1994 to 2004, according to *Latino America*, by Segura and Matt A. Barreto, the voter-registration rate among California Latinos grew 69 percent—more than twice as fast as the state's Latino population. Latino voters also swung sharply against the GOP. Republicans, who had lost the Latino vote by six points in the 1990 gubernatorial race, lost it by 46 points in 1994, then by 61 points in 1998. Before the passage of Proposition 187 in 1994, California Latinos were four points more likely to identify as Democrats than as Republicans. After Proposition 227 passed in 1998, the margin reached 51 points. The GOP's anti-immigrant efforts appear to have alienated young white voters, too. (Throughout this essay, I will consider Latinos as a distinct racial group separate from whites, as a majority of Latinos now consider themselves, even though the census does not.)

Almost two decades later, the California Republican Party still has not recovered. Latinos—who now constitute almost 40 percent of California's population and more than a quarter of its eligible voters—have voted Democratic in every presidential election since 1996 by



Until recently, immigration did not sharply divide the two parties. But today, partisanship deeply influences views toward immigrants.

at least 40 points. Democrats today control every statewide elected office, and make up close to two-thirds of the state Senate and assembly, along with almost three-quarters of California's delegation to the U.S. House of Representatives.

What's more, state policy has turned in a radically pro-immigrant direction. Over the past 15 years, California has repealed those elements of Proposition 187 that hadn't already been ruled unconstitutional, allowed undocumented immigrants to get driver's licenses, and granted them in-state tuition at public colleges. It has also begun enrolling undocumented children in the state's version of Medicaid. Even California's Republican Party has changed. Last fall, it removed the phrase *illegal alien* from its platform and stripped out language calling on law-enforcement officials to immediately deport undocumented immigrants who have committed crimes. On the question of "what to do with the millions of people who are currently here illegally," the platform now states merely that Republicans "hold diverse views."

BUT EVEN AS the California GOP retreats from its catastrophic foray into anti-immigrant politics, Republicans across the country are in the midst of their own. Until recently, immigration did not sharply divide the two national parties. In 1986, 42 percent of House Republicans, along with 64 percent of House Democrats, voted for a bill giving legal status to millions of undocumented immigrants—and Ronald Reagan signed it into law. A study of public attitudes in the early 1990s noted that "the weakness of the connection between party affiliation and opinions about immigration is striking."

Today, the opposite is true. When Pew asked last year whether immigrants make America better or worse in the long run, Democrats replied "better" by a margin of 31 points while Republicans answered "worse" by a margin of 22 points. In their recent book, *The New Immigration Federalism*, the Santa Clara University School of Law professor Pratheepan Gulasekaram and the University of California at Riverside political-science professor S. Karthick Ramakrishnan find that the rate of immigrant population growth, the percentage of Spanish-speaking

households, and local economic conditions all fail to predict state policy toward immigrants. But the partisan tilt of the state does: It is "by far" the strongest correlate to policy, they write. Overwhelmingly, Democratic-leaning states pass pro-immigrant laws. Overwhelmingly, Republican-leaning states pass anti-immigrant laws.

This partisan split undermines the claim that Republicans are embracing Trump's anti-immigration message primarily because of economic hardship. As the data journalist Nate Silver has pointed out, Trump supporters earn more than supporters of Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders. Yet Clinton and Sanders voters don't generally blame immigration for their economic woes. That merely confirms the findings of shelves full of academic studies: Personal economic circumstances are not a major driver of immigration views.

The much stronger link is between attitudes toward immigration and attitudes toward race. In 2008, two political scientists at the University of Michigan, Ted Brader and Elizabeth Suhay, along

Since the 1970s, political scientists have demonstrated that whites who express a higher level of resentment toward African Americans are more likely to identify as Republicans. Since the 1990s, as the political scientists Zoltan Hajnal and Michael Rivera detail in a 2014 paper, a similar correlation has emerged between resentment toward Latinos and Republican partisanship.

Hajnal and Rivera don't offer a reason for this correlation. But it's plausible that people who resent African Americans might have been predisposed to resent Latinos as they became an increasingly conspicuous minority group. Conservative media likely played a role in turning such predisposition into full-fledged anti-immigrant beliefs. A study for the National Hispanic Media Coalition found that listening to the right-wing radio host Michael Savage discuss immigration or reading an excerpt from Pat Buchanan's anti-immigration book *State of Emergency* made a random sample of white Americans significantly more likely to describe Latinos as unpatriotic and inclined toward crime

TRUMP IS EXPLOITING FEARS ABOUT LATINO IMMIGRANTS IN WAYS THAT ECHO NIXON'S "SOUTHERN STRATEGY."

with Nicholas A. Valentino of the University of Texas at Austin, showed several hundred white Americans a fictional news story about the negative effects of immigration. Alongside the news story was a photo of a "recent immigrant." One group of participants saw a photo of "Jose Sanchez" from Mexico. Another saw a photo of "Nikolai Vandinsky" from Russia. The men chosen for the two photos were selected such that their features were "maximally distinct on the dimension of ethnicity." The participants were then asked a series of questions about immigration policy. The result: The people who saw Sanchez were more than twice as likely to endorse anti-immigration measures as those who saw Vandinsky.

It is this connection between views about immigration and views about race that best explains why immigration has become such a partisan wedge

and gangs. The same study found that viewers of Fox News's Bill O'Reilly were more than twice as likely as viewers of MSNBC's Rachel Maddow to think Latinos take native-born Americans' jobs, and 30 percent more likely to believe that they were on welfare.

Conservative media have, in turn, created a fertile market for anti-immigrant Republican politicians: Buchanan in the 1990s; Tom Tancredo, who in 2008 tried to parlay his opposition to George W. Bush's immigration reform into a presidential run; local anti-immigrant crusaders such as Kansas's secretary of state, Kris Kobach, and Sheriff Joe Arpaio in Arizona. Trump is only the latest in a string of GOP politicians who have used hostility to immigration to build their political brand.

Like them, he is exploiting fears about Latino immigrants in ways that echo the "southern strategy," through which



Whites will remain a majority in the U.S. until the 2040s, but white identity politics can work only if they grow ever more nativist over that span.

Richard Nixon fueled and exploited a white backlash against African American civil rights. Even the anti-Latino stereotypes that Trump and Coulter peddle resemble long-standing stereotypes about blacks. Latinos—whom conservatives once viewed as more hardworking than other minorities—are now frequently depicted as welfare-demanding freeloaders. In *Adios, America*, Coulter writes, “In about ten seconds, impoverished immigrants go from *Wait—I can have this?* to *Where’s my money?*”

They are also depicted as violent. In his campaign-announcement speech, Trump said undocumented Mexican immigrants are “bringing crime.” Coulter writes, “Mexicans specialize in corpse desecration, burning people alive, rolling human heads onto packed nightclub dance floors, dissolving bodies in acid, and hanging mutilated bodies from bridges.” And as antiblack racists have for centuries, today’s anti-Latino commentators depict their targets as a sexual threat. Coulter, who chastises white women for not appreciating the unique sexual restraint of men of northern-European stock, devotes a whopping six chapters of *Adios, America* to immigrants and rape.

Of course, plenty of Republicans (and a fair number of Democrats and

independents) favor limiting immigration for reasons that have nothing to do with race. While many economists believe immigration boosts the wages of native-born Americans as a whole, it likely depresses the wages of those without a high-school degree; the debate is over how much.

But in their rhetoric, Trump and Coulter go beyond legitimate economic anxieties to rouse darker fears. Their depictions of Latino immigrants as violent, for instance, contradict clear evidence that immigration lowers local crime rates. The good news is that outside the conservative media, and outside the Republican Party, their efforts are likely to fail in spectacular fashion.

THE SOUTHERN STRATEGY lured millions of whites into the GOP. It helped Nixon, and later Ronald Reagan, win the presidency, and gradually turned most former Confederate states from blue to red. But the results this time are likely to be very different. One reason is that the Latino population is growing larger. Another—less well appreciated but just as significant—is that it’s growing more politically cohesive.

For African Americans, political cohesion has rarely been a problem.

When John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson embraced civil rights and Republicans responded with coded racial appeals to southern whites, blacks expressed their displeasure by moving into the Democratic Party en masse. But their relatively small and static numbers blunted their ability to make Republicans pay. Since 1970, the African American share of the U.S. population has grown by just two percentage points, from roughly 11 to 13 percent. The consequences are starkest in states such as Mississippi, where African Americans—who constitute 38 percent of the state’s population—are endlessly outvoted by a white population that has become almost uniformly Republican. (Only 10 percent of white Mississippians voted for Barack Obama in 2012.) If the African American share of Mississippi’s electorate rose to near 50 percent, the state’s politics would radically change. But there’s no reason to believe it will.

The Latino share of the U.S. population, by contrast, is rising fast. From 1990 to 2014, it almost doubled, from 9 percent to more than 17 percent. And while the rate of growth has slowed, the census still predicts that Latinos will reach almost 30 percent of the population by 2060.

But what’s truly ominous for the

Trump crusade is Latinos' increasing political cohesion. Anti-immigration politicians often suggest that Latinos who are in the United States legally will cheer anti-immigration initiatives, because they disproportionately compete with undocumented immigrants for jobs and suffer from the strain that these immigrants place on local resources. Once upon a time, that prediction seemed plausible. Data from the 1980s and early 1990s suggest that, back then, Latinos didn't express much political solidarity. Middle-class Latinos, unlike middle-class African Americans, drifted toward the GOP. So did Latinos who had lived in the United States for a long time. Most Latinos did not even think of themselves as Latinos. They identified instead with the specific country from which they hailed.

But by stigmatizing undocumented immigrants, Republicans have catalyzed the Latino cohesion that could be their undoing. "Latinos have until recently been a step shy of establishing a sense of group identity," Segura and Barreto write in *Latino America*. But as a result of anti-immigrant initiatives, "Latino commonalities are now gelling into such an identity." Third-generation Latinos were once significantly more likely than newer arrivals to support

that in 1989, only 20 percent of Latinos said that Latinos from different countries had a lot in common. By 2006, that figure had risen to 50 percent.

It's because they are growing both more numerous and more cohesive that Latinos in California have not suffered the fate of blacks in Mississippi. Instead, their political fortunes have followed a curve. Initially, California's rising Latino population sparked a white backlash. But over time, the combination of Latino population growth and Latino political solidarity helped turn California politics in a pro-immigrant direction. In the years to come, we're likely to see a similar shift in America as a whole.

THE KEY QUESTION is how long it will take. It's possible to imagine a scenario in which whites nationwide react to growing Latino political power the way whites respond to blacks in Mississippi: The higher Latino numbers grow, the more they will vote for anti-immigration candidates. Given that whites will likely remain a majority in the United States until the 2040s, and a majority of voters until well after that, a Mississippi-style scenario could mean that nativism flourishes for decades to come.

WHAT'S TRULY OMINOUS FOR THE TRUMP CRUSADE IS LATINOS' INCREASING POLITICAL COHESION—WHICH REPUBLICANS HAVE CATALYZED.

reducing immigration. But in recent years, that generation gap has closed. In 2012, even fourth-generation Latinos told pollsters they were far less likely to back candidates who wanted to crack down on the undocumented than candidates who didn't.

"Anti-immigrant rhetoric renders all Latinos immigrants," says Cristina Beltrán, a political theorist who directs the Latino-studies department at NYU. "It creates a sense of shared vulnerability and outrage." That shared vulnerability is also helping to erode the distinctions among Latinos who hail from different countries. The political scientists Marisa Abrajano and R. Michael Alvarez note

The problem with this scenario is that it requires whites to grow ever more nativist as Latinos grow in number and political influence. That probably won't happen. California didn't flip from anti-immigration to pro-immigration just because its Latino population grew larger and more cohesive. It also flipped because enough whites joined Latinos and other minorities in voting for pro-immigration candidates. Since the anti-immigrant initiatives of the mid-1990s, white Californians have not responded to Latinos the way white Mississippians respond to blacks—by voting en masse for the other party. Obama won 45 percent of white Californians in 2012,

six points more than the 39 percent of whites he won nationwide.

As Latinos assimilate, whites become less hostile to them. A forthcoming article in the *American Sociological Review* by Ariela Schachter, a graduate student in sociology at Stanford, shows that whites are more comfortable having Latinos as neighbors if those Latinos speak English well, work in high-status occupations, have a white spouse, were born in the United States, and are in the United States legally. When Latinos look and sound like Marco Rubio or the NFL quarterback Mark Sanchez, whites are less likely to stigmatize them.

Whites, in other words, view Latinos more positively when they integrate into the middle class. And the longer Latinos stay in the United States, the more they do just that. Although only 10 percent of noncitizen Latino immigrants intermarry, 30 percent of their children do. Second-generation Mexican Americans are far better-educated than their parents and significantly less likely to hold low-status jobs. A study in Southern California found that among third-generation Mexican Americans, 96 percent prefer to speak English at home.

A big reason nativist sentiment is strong today is that immigration has outpaced assimilation: Because so many poor Latino immigrants have entered the United States in recent decades, most Latinos haven't looked or sounded like Rubio or Sanchez. From 1980 to 2007, the share of Latino adults born outside the U.S. rose from 39 to 55 percent.

That immigration wave, however, has passed. Although you'd never know it listening to Trump, more Mexicans have left the United States than entered it since 2009. According to the Census Bureau, in 2013, the No. 1 source of immigrants to the U.S. wasn't Mexico. It was China. Even more surprising, scholars don't think large-scale Mexican immigration is coming back. The Great Recession depressed Mexican immigration because immigrants couldn't find jobs. But if that were the only reason for the decline, immigration would have rebounded as the U.S. economy improved. It has not. Tougher border enforcement has played some role in reducing immigration levels. Greater economic opportunity in Mexico has too. But the biggest

reason Mexican immigration is way down is that Mexican women are having far fewer children than they used to. In 1960, the average Mexican woman had more than six children. By 2009, she had just over two. This vast reduction in fertility has deflated Mexico's youth bubble: The average Mexican is now almost a decade older than in 1970. This affects immigration levels because, in the words of the Princeton sociologist Douglas Massey, "If people don't begin migrating [from Mexico to the U.S.] between the ages of 15 and 30, they generally don't migrate at all."

Since 2000, Latino migration from El Salvador and Guatemala has increased, largely in response to gang violence and economic distress, thus partly offsetting the Mexican decline. But those two countries together contain fewer than one-fifth as many people as Mexico. And as in Mexico, birthrates have fallen dramatically in both countries, meaning that over time, there will be fewer young adults to make the trip north.

The immigration slowdown is already changing the composition of America's Latino population. Since its 2007 peak, the percentage of Latino

anti-Mexican rhetoric. The town's mayor was nonplussed. In Muscatine, he noted, "if you see a young middle-school Latino lad on the street, he probably doesn't even speak Spanish."

PERHAPS THE BEST EVIDENCE that America as a whole is experiencing a California-style flip away from nativist politics is the reaction to Trump's candidacy itself. As in California in the 1990s, Republican nativism is sparking a surge in Latino voter registration. Since Trump entered the race last summer, the number of immigrants becoming American citizens in Texas has risen from 1,200 a month to 2,200 a month, and a higher percentage of the newly naturalized is registering to vote. The trend is similar nationwide.

And as in California in the 1990s, Latinos have unified across ancestral, generational, and class lines against the GOP standard-bearer. According to polling of registered voters by the firm Latino Decisions, Trump's unfavorability rating is 88 percent among foreign-born Latinos, and 86 percent among Latinos born in the U.S. Among Latinos who earn less than \$40,000 a

that even if Trump defeats Clinton by 20 points among whites—the same margin Mitt Romney achieved in 2012—and even if African Americans don't turn out for Clinton at the rates they turned out for Obama, Trump will still need more than 40 percent of Latinos to win the popular vote. That's extraordinarily unlikely.

Even if Trump-style anti-Latino politics fails nationally, it may still enjoy a half-life in particular states. It's most likely to thrive in the South, where the white population is conservative and the Latino population remains small. The first senator to endorse Trump was Alabama's Jeff Sessions, the Senate's most fervent opponent of illegal immigration. In 2012, *The New York Times* found that of the 14 states that had either passed or taken steps to pass laws cracking down on undocumented immigrants, nine were in the old Confederacy.

But nationwide, Republicans are unlikely to win consistently with a message that Latinos perceive as hostile.

Many white ethnics began voting Republican in the 1960s and '70s, even though the GOP had led a nativist backlash against their forefathers in the early 20th century. Eventually, something similar could happen among Latinos. Yet that process will begin only once the GOP turns definitively away from Coulter- and Trump-style nativism. The longer it takes the GOP to make Latino immigrants feel welcome, the longer it will take for the descendants of those immigrants to follow the increasingly conservative political trajectory that Italians, Irish, and Poles traveled during the past century.

Many Republican elites know this. They knew it in 2012, when an autopsy sponsored by the party after Romney's loss stated, "If Hispanic Americans perceive that a GOP nominee or candidate does not want them in the United States (i.e. self-deportation), they will not pay attention to our next sentence."

What they don't know is how to build a party that contains both Latinos and the supporters of Donald Trump. Whether Republican leaders can solve that dilemma may well determine whether the party lives or dies. **A**

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MORE MEXICANS HAVE LEFT THE UNITED STATES THAN ENTERED IT SINCE 2009.

adults born abroad has declined about five percentage points, to just under 50 percent. Since 1990, the share of foreign-born Mexican Americans who have lived in the U.S. for five years or less has dropped by more than two-thirds. The Latino share of the U.S. population will continue to rise for decades, because Latinos in the U.S. are younger, on average, than whites and blacks—and because the Latino birthrate, though falling, remains higher. But unlike in prior decades, most of that growth will come from Latinos born in the U.S.

As American Latinos become less culturally and economically distinct from society at large, white hostility toward them is likely to wane. *The New York Times* provided a taste of this last fall when it sent a reporter to Muscatine, Iowa, to see how local Republicans were responding to Donald Trump's

year, it is 90 percent, and among those who earn more than \$80,000 a year, it is 85 percent. Among Mexican Americans, Trump's unfavorability rating is 90 percent. Among Cuban Americans, historically the most Republican Latino group, it is 82 percent.

Such overwhelming opposition is hard to overcome. Before early May, when Trump effectively secured the Republican nomination, polls showed him leading Hillary Clinton among whites by high single digits. By late May, with Hillary Clinton still competing against Bernie Sanders, Trump's edge among whites had risen to between 12 and 24 points. If Clinton can consolidate Sanders's support after she wins the Democratic nomination, Trump's margin among whites might dip. But regardless, Trump probably can't win. A study by Latino Decisions found

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Research
suggests
the causes
of madness
aren't always
just in
your head.



When the Body Attacks the Mind



PHOTOGRAPH BY IBÁN RAMÓN;
ARTWORK BY JOHN DEARDOURFF

ONE DAY IN FEBRUARY

2009, a 13-year-old boy named Sasha Egger started thinking that people were coming to hurt his family. His mother, Helen, watched with mounting panic that evening as her previously healthy son forgot the rules to Uno, his favorite card game, while playing it. She began making frantic phone calls the next morning. By then, Sasha was shuffling aimlessly around the yard, shredding paper and stuffing it in his pockets. “He looked like an old person with dementia,” Helen later told me.

That afternoon, Sasha was admitted to the hospital, where he saw a series of specialists. One thought Sasha might have bipolar disorder and put him on antipsychotics, but the drugs didn’t help. Helen, a child psychiatrist at Duke University, knew that psychiatric conditions develop gradually. Sasha’s symptoms had appeared almost overnight, and some of them—including dilated pupils and slurred speech—suggested not mental illness but neurological dysfunction. When she and her husband, Daniel, raised these issues, though, one doctor seemed to think they were in denial.

Sasha, meanwhile, grew increasingly agitated and refused to eat. Food tasted like sewage, he said. Just five days after his strange behavior began, he was in the intensive-care unit, heavily sedated and being fed through a tube. No one knew for sure what was wrong with him.

From that point, his parents say, Sasha could have continued on a downward trajectory—toward institutionalization or even death. But one of Helen’s colleagues, a neurologist named Mohamad Mikati, had listened to their story and conducted a few low-tech tests. Could Sasha touch his nose? Not very easily. Could he draw a clock? Yes, but without the hands.

Mikati had seen a case like Sasha’s years earlier, in an 11-year-old boy who suffered for three months and then spontaneously recovered. The cause, Mikati thought, had been encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain. Suspecting that Sasha might have something similar, Mikati ordered an electroencephalogram, a test that monitors electrical activity in the brain.

Daniel Egger watched the needle on the machine dance around all night, a sign of brain dysfunction. Here was a clue, Daniel hoped, that might point the way toward a true diagnosis and treatment.

If Sasha was suffering from encephalitis, though, what had triggered it? Scientists have long known that hallucinations and delusional behavior can result when infections inflame the brain, but Mikati had ruled out such an infection. He knew, however, that autoimmune variants of encephalitis existed. Just two years earlier, in fact, scientists had identified one

that resulted when the immune system—perhaps triggered by common infections elsewhere in the body—accidentally attacked crucial receptors in the brain. Symptoms could resemble those of schizophrenia, but proper treatment didn’t involve antipsychotics. Instead, therapy was directed at the immune system.

Mikati gave Sasha an infusion of antibodies that can quell autoimmune attacks, and the boy improved almost immediately. Color returned to his face. His eyes began to focus again. He calmed down. He started asking for food.

Helen and Daniel Egger felt a burst of relief. Then they felt vindicated, and saddened. They’d encountered what seemed like tremendous resistance from some doctors. What happened to patients whose parents were less aggressive or had fewer resources—who didn’t happen to have a child psychiatrist in the family? “If I was not my son’s mother, with my connections, my son would be dead,” Helen told me. “That’s just horrifying.”

For Helen, given her background, the experience also raised a much larger question: If an autoimmune disorder of the brain could so closely resemble psychiatric illnesses, then what, really, were these illnesses?

THE IDEA that madness might have a discrete, biological cause—that it isn’t just in your head—stretches back at least to the late 19th century, when Europe’s asylums were full of delusional and demented patients suffering from neurosyphilis, a late-stage complication of the venereal disease. The notion that targeting the immune system could cure insanity also has history. In 1927, the Austrian psychiatrist Julius Wagner-Jauregg received the Nobel Prize for his “pyrotherapy”—whereby he deliberately infected patients with malaria to induce a fever. (His treatment worked for some patients, but a few unlucky ones died of malaria.)

After languishing for almost a century, this idea has re-emerged, prompted in part by observations linking the immune system to psychiatric symptoms. Scientists have found, for example, that simply activating people’s immune systems as though they were fighting a viral infection can cause profound despair and suicidal thoughts.

For years, scientists believed the brain was mostly cut off from the immune system by the so-called blood-brain barrier, and they lacked a clear mechanistic understanding of how the immune system could cause behavioral disturbances. In 2007, Josep Dalmau, a neurologist then at the University of Pennsylvania, described a condition he called anti-NMDA receptor encephalitis, in which the immune system attacks a crucial receptor in the brain, producing severe neurological and psychiatric symptoms—including behavior sometimes compared to that of the possessed girl in *The Exorcist*.

Scientists had previously noted that certain autoimmune diseases, such as lupus, were associated with psychosis. And they’d begun to suspect that some infections might, by activating the immune system, contribute to psychiatric conditions. But Dalmau provided meticulous proof that the immune system could attack the

Doctors can now treat people who would have been given up for lost and locked away.



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brain. The development of a test for the disorder, and the fact that very sick patients could recover with treatment, prompted a wave of interest in autoimmune conditions of the central nervous system. In total, scientists have identified about two dozen others—including dementia-like conditions, epilepsies, and a Parkinson’s-like “stiff person” syndrome—and many experts suspect that more exist.

Many of these disorders are treatable with aggressive immunotherapy. “It’s a breakthrough,” Heather Van Mater, a pediatric rheumatologist at Duke who has cared for Sasha, told me. She and her colleagues treat people who, just 10 years ago, might have been given up for lost and locked away. “We can make them better,” Van Mater said. “It’s unbelievably rewarding.”

While each of these autoimmune conditions is rare, the field of autoimmune neurology is expanding, and may force a re-examination of mental illness generally. Some scientists now wonder whether small subsets of depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder may be somehow linked to problems in the immune system.

Evidence exists to support this idea. Robert Yolken, a scientist at Johns Hopkins University, estimates that about one-third of schizophrenics show signs of immune activation (though he adds that this could be related to other factors, such as smoking and obesity). And autoimmune diseases are more common among schizophrenics and their immediate families than among the general population, which could hint at a shared genetic vulnerability. Immunological abnormalities have been observed in patients with bipolar disorder and depression as well.

A recent retrospective study by scientists at the Mayo Clinic, a center of research on autoimmune neurological conditions, found that, compared with a control group of healthy people, psychiatric patients were more likely to harbor antibodies directed at brain tissue. One implication is that some of these patients’ psychiatric symptoms might have stemmed from autoimmune problems, and that they might have benefited from immunotherapy.

Scientists are also increasingly interested in the link between depression and systemic inflammation, an immune-system response to infection or other potential triggers such as a lousy diet, obesity, chronic stress, or trauma. Studies suggest that about one-third of people diagnosed with depression have high levels of inflammation markers in their blood. Scientists have posited that the malaise and lethargy of depression may really be a kind of sickness behavior, an instinct to lie low and recover that, in its proper context—infection or illness—aids survival. Problems arise when the immune system stays activated for a long time, possibly leading to clinical depression.

This emerging understanding of the immune system’s role in determining how we feel and behave suggests new avenues

of treatment for psychiatric conditions. In 2013, Emory University scientists saw improvement in depressed patients who had markers showing high levels of systemic inflammation, and who’d failed to respond to standard treatment, when they were administered an immunosuppressant called infliximab. Other researchers have found that aspirin, perhaps the oldest anti-inflammatory drug around, may be helpful as an add-on therapy for schizophrenia.

AND THEN THERE are cases like Sasha Egger’s. He relapsed a year and a half after his initial recovery. It was the first of five major relapses, two of which required months-long hospital stays.

Although Sasha was diagnosed with autoimmune encephalitis, scientists have yet to pinpoint which antibodies are causing havoc in his brain. He may suffer from a condition whose antibody markers have yet to be identified, or his condition may involve other components of the immune system.

Sasha is now 21, and he says he feels as though he has embers in his brain that overheat and need cooling. To control flares, he uses powerful drugs, originally developed for cancer, that suppress his immune system.

His memory formation stops during relapses, and he had to miss many months of high school over the years. He nonetheless managed to graduate with straight A’s and was admitted to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he started this past January. “If I write a book, I will call it *Fragmented Memories*,” he wrote in his application essay. “After each hospitalization, I have had to re-build my life from scratch.”

The Eggers hope for a cure in Sasha’s lifetime—a way to definitively reboot his immune system. “I just need to have him hold on until that cure comes,” Helen told me. She and Daniel co-founded the nonprofit Autoimmune Encephalitis Alliance, along with Susannah Cahalan—the author of a memoir, *Brain on Fire: My Month of Madness*, about her experience with the condition—and Leslie and Will McDow, whose daughter died from autoimmune encephalitis.

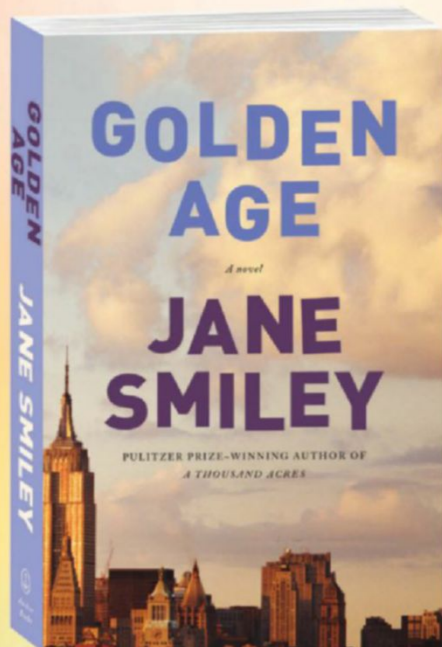
One of the Eggers’ goals is simply to raise awareness about the condition. Given their experience, though, they can’t help but wonder about other psychiatric conditions that may be immune-system disorders in disguise. In some sense, their larger aim is to heal the long-standing rift between psychiatry and neurology—between the concepts of brain and mind. Too often, psychosis is seen as the disease itself, Helen told me. But “psychosis is like a fever,” she said. “It’s a symptom of a lot of different illnesses.” **A**



Sasha Egger was hospitalized in 2009, at age 13, after developing mysterious psychiatric symptoms almost overnight.

Moises Velasquez-Manoff is a journalist and the author of An Epidemic of Absence: A New Way of Understanding Allergies and Autoimmune Diseases.

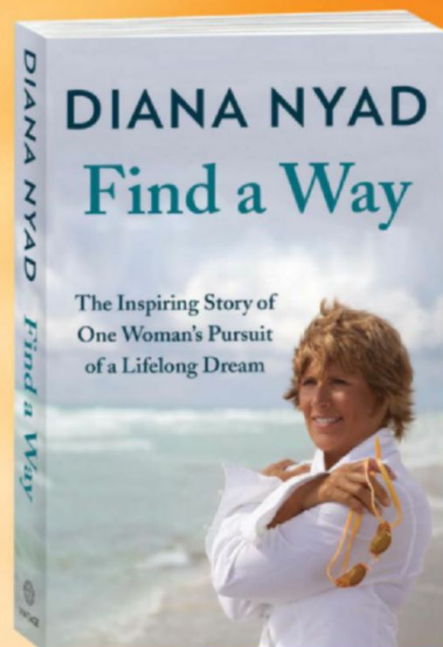
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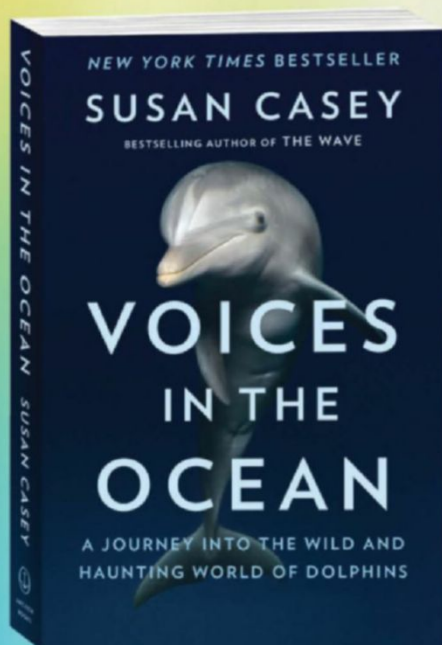
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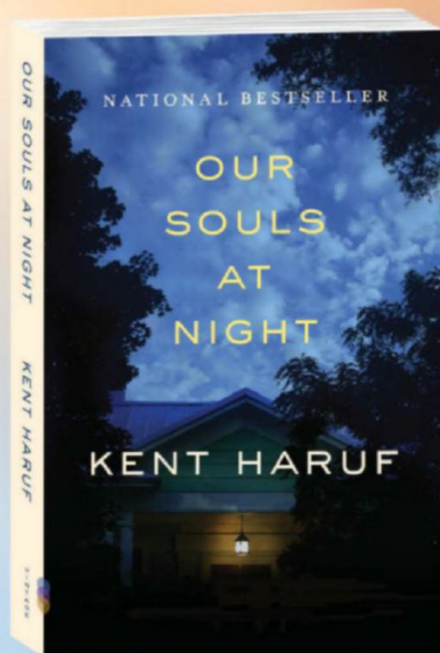
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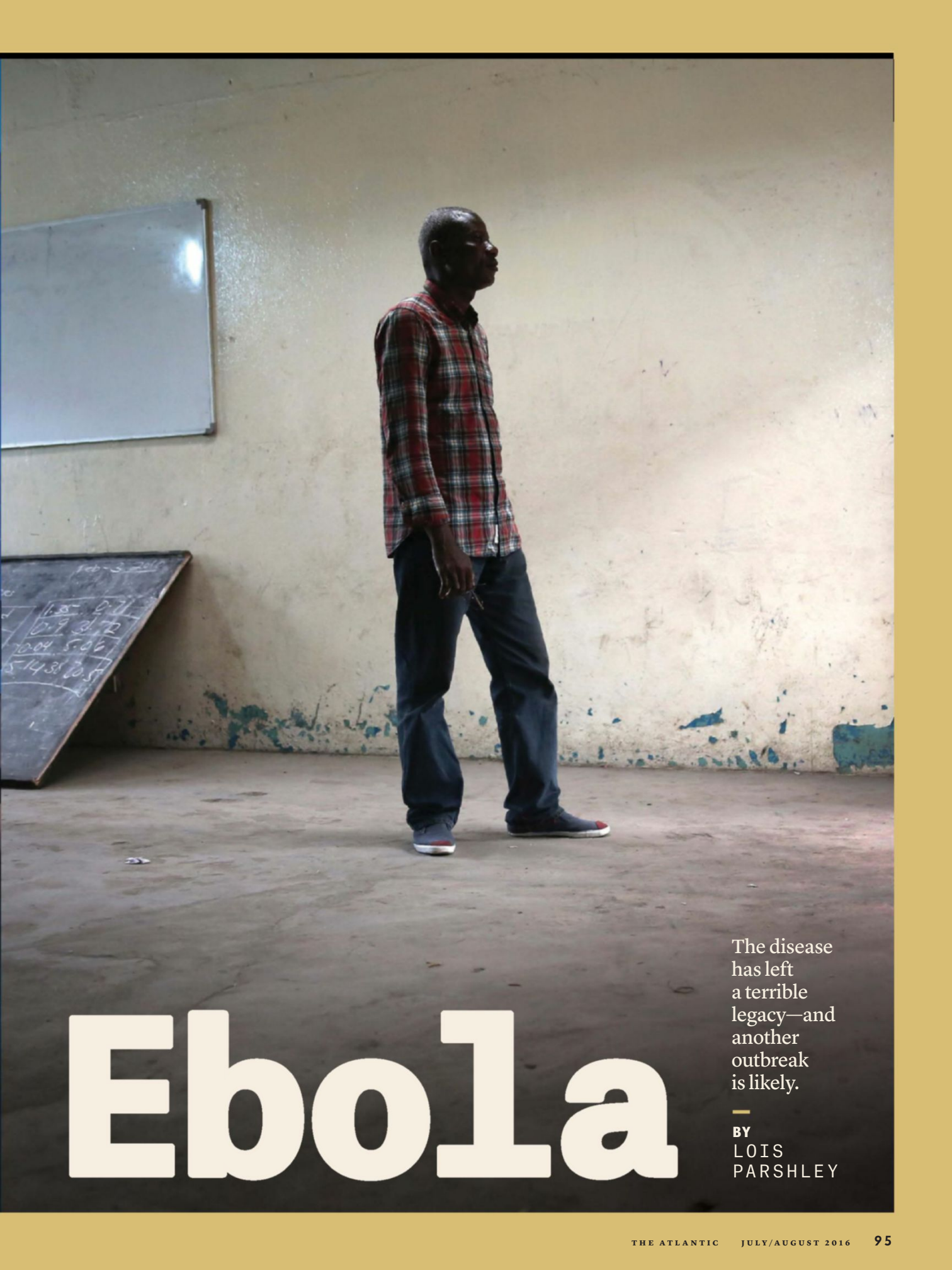
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 **ANCHOR**



Left: Omu Fahnbulleh stands over her husband, Ibrahim, after he fell in a classroom used as an Ebola ward in August 2014 in Monrovia, Liberia. *Right:* A caretaker in a classroom of the same school in February 2016.

After



Ebola

The disease has left a terrible legacy—and another outbreak is likely.

—
BY
LOIS
PARSHLEY

THE OPEN-AIR

GoByeandChop market in Monrovia, Liberia, sprawls across a field of mud. Customers pool around rough stalls, repurposed shipping containers, and wheelbarrows full of underwear or cassava tubers. When I visited the market late last year, the damp air smelled of coal-fire smoke and spices and rotting garbage. A dog's corpse lay bloated in a puddle pockmarked by steady rain.

Deep in the market sat a dim warehouse filled with tables of meat: fried fish, eels, a few goats' heads covered in flies. Then row after row of bushmeat, wild game killed by hunters. Many of the piled-up cuts were unidentifiable, but the origins of one heap near the front was clear. At the top, a monkey's hand curled dried fingers toward the ceiling.

Long before West Africa's 2014 Ebola epidemic, Liberia was already stricken—by poverty, corruption, hunger. Bushmeat, a cheap source of protein, is a source of the disease, and scarcity, more generally, is what typically brings people into contact with the virus. The 2014 outbreak began when a toddler in a rural village in nearby Guinea touched an infected animal, most likely a wild fruit bat, following heavy deforestation of the surrounding area. The disease quickly spread to more than 28,000 people—nearly 11,000 of them Liberian.

Bushmeat is now banned in Liberia, but dozens of vendors at the GoByeandChop, along with hundreds more at other markets throughout Monrovia, Liberia's capital, break the law daily. "I don't believe it's in my meat," a woman named Rebecca Klhea told me as she stood behind a table of quartered and smoked monkeys. "I've been doing this 20 years. I haven't got Ebola."

Despite the panic the epidemic caused, many Liberians still don't know how the virus spreads. Before the outbreak, the country's population of 4 million was served by just 50 licensed doctors (no one knows definitively how many there are today). It is the world's eighth-poorest country, and is still stunted by a civil war that killed 150,000 people and displaced another 850,000 from 1989 to 2003. It sits prominently on various unfortunate lists—classified as a fragile state by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, ranked highly vulnerable on the Global Vulnerability and Crisis Assessment Index. In a country so weak and so fragmented, the disease was impossible to control.

Now, about a year and a half after the peak of the outbreak, the vast assemblage of foreign disease experts and health-care workers and crisis-response teams who finally helped contain it has largely departed. But the virus keeps resurfacing. Ten flare-ups have been recorded in West Africa since Liberia was first declared Ebola-free, in May 2015. Three have occurred in Liberia itself. Like the dead, survivors of the initial epidemic number in the thousands. Experts believe the virus can be sexually transmitted for many months after symptoms abate.

"There are places where diseases are likely to emerge," says William Karesh, an emerging-disease specialist at the Eco-Health Alliance and an adviser to the World Health Organization. Karesh believes it's possible to map disease emergence the way geologists map earthquake risk. The risk is highest in places where land use has recently changed—as it has in Liberia, where poverty and displacement have led people to cut aggressively into jungle, to log forests, to hunt deeper into the bush.

"We should be thinking ahead of time," Karesh says. "We change building codes to be more prepared" for an earthquake. "We should do the same" for disease preparedness. He says that instituting better education and early-detection programs in high-risk areas could do a lot to prevent future outbreaks.

Yet in many respects, Liberia remains as poorly prepared for an epidemic as it was before Ebola burst from the bush. The poverty that made the 2014 epidemic possible appears to have deepened. Although the country has fallen out of the headlines, epidemiologists believe another outbreak is likely. That, of course, is not a problem only for West Africa. Thanks to international travel, viruses spread like never before.

L EVI LEARWELLIE, a string bean of a man, squatted down on the floor of his mud hut in Kingsville, a township on the outskirts of Monrovia. "Many families suffered here," Learwellie said, gesturing toward the small huddle of huts around his own. "During Ebola time, you couldn't even visit your friends. Even in your own house, you can't touch anyone. You couldn't hug your kids. People were very afraid." As Ebola spread, airlines canceled flights to Monrovia, the offices of multinational businesses shuttered, schools and markets closed. Eventually, people stopped leaving their houses altogether. After farmers ate the food they'd stored, they began eating the seed rice they'd saved to plant the next year's crops. After that, they ate nothing.

"When persons die, the government people come way dressed up. They stick the body in the car and carry them from the town," Learwellie said. He scuffed at the dirt floor with a foot. "Ebola killed most of my family. Eleven persons died."

Left: Police enforce a quarantine in West Point, the largest slum in Monrovia, in August 2014. Right: West Point in February 2016—normal routines hide deep scars.



After farmers ate their stores, they ate their seed rice. Then they ate nothing.

Ebola lingers like a ghost over Monrovia. In West Point, a crowded slum that spills between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mesurado River, on the edge of the city, I visited a school that had been temporarily converted into a treatment center during the crisis. I arrived after heavy rains, and the neighborhood's narrow maze of alleys was flooded with a mixture of rainwater and sewer water. Near the school, a woman in a hijab bathed a girl in a tin bucket. Since the epidemic, the building had been transformed: stripped bare and washed, new floors laid, freshly painted. It stood conspicuously new in the ramshackle alley. But it remained mostly empty; many students were still staying away.

Next door, Richard KoiKoi, a member of West Point's Ebola response team, drank a beer at a bar. It was late morning, and the day's sticky heat beaded on the bottle. "Everyone's talking to us, but at the end, people just leave," KoiKoi said. During the epidemic, he drove the sick to the treatment center, and also retrieved the bodies of the dead. Local response teams like KoiKoi's—supported by international experts after initial containment strategies failed—played a crucial role in controlling the disease, though at a heavy cost: Across the region, 815 health-care workers, including 22 drivers, contracted Ebola. The teams have largely been disbanded since, their surviving members left to find other jobs.

KoiKoi's team was still theoretically operational, along with a hotline established to provide it with leads. But he was one of many people in West Point who felt forsaken. "Where are we supposed to take sick people now?" he asked, pointing out the window at the school. "Yesterday, we had a suspected case of Ebola referred." But he and his team members didn't follow up. "I'm owed my back pay for two months. So I'm sitting here now."

In January—within hours of Liberia being declared Ebola-free for the third time—the WHO announced that it would be investigating a case in nearby Sierra Leone. In March, a survivor transmitted the virus to another person (possibly through sex), and it spread to at least 10 more people, killing eight. Two

people died before anyone in a position of authority knew of the flare-up. "We know the virus is still circulating in West Africa," William Karesh says. "The fact that there's currently no human cases doesn't mean the disease isn't present."

ON THE HIGHWAY heading out of Monrovia, a cargo truck veered suddenly, plunging off the road. It careened through a crowded yard and smacked into a house. People rushed toward the steaming wreck. Women screamed.

Pedelers Craig, a Liberian agriculture expert accompanying me to Lofa County to investigate the state of Liberia's food security, went to have a look. "No one died!" he reported back. The front-left wheel had wedged into a plum tree, stopping the truck just feet from men drinking in the kitchen. Despite the miracle, Craig looked troubled. Apparently, the driver had known the truck had a steering problem and decided to venture forth anyway. "There are a lot of people willing to do the same work," he explained.

The road was well paved for a few more kilometers, and then, as soon as a development project ended, it wasn't. Concrete broke into gravel and then became mud. Craig couldn't stop thinking about the truck driver. "People are doing things out of their will," he said, "because that's the only way to get daily bread." Traffic in both lanes swerved around axle-deep holes, and for a while we bounced along in silence.

Eventually we passed a former camp for those displaced by the country's civil war. Though Lofa County was historically the breadbasket of the region, agricultural production fell by about three-quarters during the war, and has never fully recovered—Liberia now imports most of its food. Many people in Lofa today harvest just enough rice for their own use, and even they often end up buying expensive imports because of low yields or a lack of storage facilities. Craig put it simply: "Rainy season," before the harvest, "is hunger season."

This year, hunger is progressing toward famine. During the height of the Ebola epidemic, quarantines kept farmers from working together in *kools*, a traditional form of communal labor. Weeks of watching the sick and dying prompted many to flee. Kenyeh Barlay, a member of the Agriculture and Food Security Programme Unit of the Mano River Union, a West African intergovernmental association, told me that during the 2015 spring planting season, roughly 90 percent of farm plots in Lofa had been abandoned.

In Jalamai Waterside, a small village off the main road into Lofa, the town chief gathered villagers in a central shelter to speak with us, at Craig's request. A farmer in a floppy hat named Murphy Smith spoke first. "Things here have gone from bad to worse," he said. Many people had cleared their land of the natural vegetation that sprouts quickly when fields are left untended, but they had nothing left to plant. Smith, like most people in Lofa, eats once a day, usually cooking late in the evening so hunger doesn't keep him from sleeping.

"We're trying to clear brush now," Garmai Tokpa, the town chief, a thin woman in a green



traditional dress suit, said, but they had no seeds. The United Nations World Food Programme says it last distributed food here through a partner, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, back in December 2014. This method of subcontracting is common, and often muddies who is responsible for what. Either the food never reached Jalamai Waterside, or the dozens of people I spoke with were lying. Whichever the case, the residents were struggling. Tokpa had heard that the next community down the road, Beyan's Town, had been given money and food. "Why can't they share with us?" Smith asked.

At a checkpoint before Beyan's Town, a rope was strung across the road, near a wash bucket. Because Ebola spreads by fluids, frequent handwashing is a useful prevention method. We were not asked to use the bucket. Kolubah Agoui, the town chief, had one eye and rubber boots. He stood beneath a giant cotton tree as rain started to fall. A woman sat on the roots nearby to nurse a gaunt baby. "No, WFP didn't bring food here," Agoui said. Nor did the government. "There's no help coming."

It was the same down the road in Salayea, a sizable town where life has still not returned to normal. Flomo Banna, a farmer wearing a LIFE IS GOOD T-shirt, said, "You see WFP trucks go by with food, but they don't stop here. They don't come to this town." (According to the World Food Programme, supplies were distributed to Salayea in November 2014.) Banna didn't know anyone who'd received food. "We don't know where the food goes," he said. "Beyan's Town, they say they go there."

Across the road, Domego Kollie, the Ministry of Agriculture's district officer, paused on his way home. He was dressed in a collared shirt, carrying a leather briefcase. "It's not hard for farmers to get food now, because people are harvesting," he said. "If people tell you they are satisfied, they think they won't get anything from you." That said, he didn't know how many farmers had been able to return to their fields, or how many had seed to plant. "After Ebola, I haven't been issued any gasoline, so I have to buy my own gas to reach farms." His forays had been limited.

IN THE UP-COUNTRY, twilight comes in phases. First you hear the crickets, then the sky blushes over the tips of the tall grass. Our Jeep had broken a wheel shaft and sat sullenly in the middle of a dirt road. It began to drizzle, the water hissing as it hit the hot engine. Craig was practically spitting. "Liberia is like a claw hammer," he said. "No matter who you are, it slashes you."

Eventually, we hitched a ride. In the back of the stranger's car, Craig told me, "When I was working at Catholic Relief Services, other guys were stealing food. My friends built big, big houses. I could live on my salary; I'm happy with my place. And they say I'm stupid." Decades of graft and the absence of social protections have led to a reversal of ordinary values, where honesty can read as untrustworthiness.

Though Craig's family had stayed healthy during the outbreak, he was struggling. Acute crises in Liberia—the war, Ebola—have punctuated chronic dysfunction, and government and international aid budgets allocated to help solve the country's problems have been

depleted without lasting effect. For instance, of the 382 vehicles donated during the epidemic to be used as ambulances, the General Services Agency of Liberia was able to account for only 268 in a recent audit. The remainder have been misplaced.

Depending on whom you ask, the country's food situation ranges from uncomfortable to dire. Though Liberia is not now considered to be experiencing a famine—whose technical definition involves a death rate of one person per 10,000 a day—630,000 Liberians don't have enough to eat, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization, which has the most conservative estimate. The World Food Programme says that more than half the country's population is borderline food-insecure or worse.

Even in the best of circumstances, real-time data can be hard to come by, but Gavin Macgregor-Skinner, a global-projects manager for the Elizabeth R. Griffin Research Foundation, which focuses on global health security and infectious disease, says the lack of accurate statistics in Liberia is extreme. "It shows that the international effort has fallen apart," he says bluntly. "Data are never this hard to find. Something is really wrong." Typically, in the first 24 hours of any disaster response, aid workers go door-to-door to ask those affected what their needs are. Two years later, a comprehensive needs assessment has yet to be completed for Liberia. The problems that Ebola left in its wake, Macgregor-Skinner says, are "so serious, people don't know where to start."

LAST SUMMER, on the top floor of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan, a group of disaster experts, led by Michael McDonald, the coordinator of the Global Health Response and Resilience Alliance, met to discuss what had gone wrong in West Africa. The group had broken away from the UN International Ebola Recovery Conference, taking place at the same time in the city. Name a disaster in the past 30 years, and someone in that room had been there.

The idea of empowering local people has recently come into vogue in aid circles, and getting community buy-in—using peer groups to monitor potential Ebola victims and educate people about how the disease spread—was what eventually turned the epidemic's tide, says Peter Graaff, the WHO's director of emergency operations and Ebola response. "Ebola proved local decision making can be an effective contribution to disease response."

Project Concern International is one organization that has adopted such an approach. Jolene Mullins, the group's Liberia director at the time of the epidemic, said that Project Concern International worked with local leaders and traditional healers in 700 towns to provide practical health advice. Because the organization had preexisting relationships with many of these leaders, and because these leaders (rather than foreign experts or contractors) were the ones spreading the word about the disease, the townspeople trusted the advice—and 95 percent of the towns remained Ebola-free.

Of course, a logical consequence of community empowerment is an eventual decrease

"There will be more flare-ups ... These countries will have to assume Ebola will come back."



Top: A Coke billboard in Monrovia last November celebrates resilience. Bottom: Jenneh Getu, an Ebola survivor who lost her husband and 3-year-old son, and is now ostracized by her surviving family members, awaits a psychological-counseling session.

in dependency—on foreign aid, on the national government. And any change to the way that aid is delivered tends to meet resistance from national governments and entrenched aid providers, particularly when it involve shifts in resources. Patronage networks are powerful, says George Hurlburt, a scientist at STEMCorp, and have a vested self-interest in maintaining the status quo.

Still, it is obvious that business as usual in West Africa crippled disaster-response efforts during the epidemic. “Nearly everyone involved in the outbreak response failed to see some fairly plain writing on the wall,” the WHO said in a draft report obtained in October 2014 by the Associated Press. Liberia was—and is—too weak and too fragmented for traditional crisis response to work.

Bryan Murphy-Eustis, the executive director of Partners in Health Liberia, says, “If you believe, as I do, that Ebola preyed upon a fractured health system, then anything less than a systematic and long-term strengthening of the health system falls short of what’s needed.” But 30 to 40 percent of Liberians lack access to health care today, just the same as before the epidemic. And now that aid budgets are moving on to the next international emergency, Zika, only one Ebola treatment center remains operational. “Ebola eroded the already weak confidence in the health system,” Murphy-Eustis says, and serious new health problems have begun to emerge. During the outbreak, “mass vaccination campaigns were postponed to avoid public gatherings,” he says. Drug regimens for contagious diseases were disrupted, which has led, for instance, to an increase in mortality from multiple-drug-resistant tuberculosis.

There have been some concrete improvements as a result of international investment to date. “Lab capacity has expanded,” Graaff says (although the labs are unable to do some types of advanced work—in March, during the latest Ebola flare-up in Liberia, a specialist had to be flown in to help with genome sequencing). Health workers have been trained in triage and in rapid recognition of the early symptoms of Ebola. But as Murphy-Eustis points out, in the long term, the outlook is poor.

Even on an issue as simple as handwashing, the anecdotal evidence is troubling. No one I spoke with in Liberia still had stores of donated soap, and while donated wash buckets were scattered around neighborhoods, they were typically being used as market baskets or dish holders. “It’s one thing to talk about the philosophy of resiliency, and another to have actually resilient systems,” Michael McDonald told me.

“Statistically, there will be more flare-ups in the survivor population,” Peter Graaff says. And down the road, “these countries will have to assume Ebola will come back.”

A COCA-COLA AD CAMPAIGN in Monrovia late last year focused on Liberia’s future. “I believe in a happy, better Liberia,” one billboard read. “I’m hopeful of better days,” said another. A third showed a photo of an Ebola survivor, facing the camera straight on with her arms raised over her head in a V for victory. “I made it,” the ad says. “I believe.”

Near one of the billboards, a survivor of the disease, Jenneh Getu, looked out a hospital window at the ambulances in the parking lot being pelted by hard rain, as the psychological-counseling session she’d come for began. “The sickness grabbed my husband,” Getu said. “After four days, he died. We had just finished burying him when my son’s skin started getting hot.” Getu brought her 3-year-old from her rural hometown to Monrovia for help. “My son died on my lap in the taxi,” she said. “I was forced to hold that body tight so people didn’t know it’s Ebola.”

Getu called the health team charged with handling Ebola cases in the capital, but no one came. For days, she sat with her son’s corpse in an empty house in Monrovia. Eventually, she got sick, turned herself in at a treatment center, and waited to die. But she didn’t. “I survived,” she said. “But I feel like a different human being. I’m different from other people. Even my family rejects me now.” Emmanuel Ballah, the attending physician’s assistant, handed her a tissue. He and his colleagues at the Doctors Without Borders clinic within the hospital treat several hundred Ebola survivors for medical and psychological problems.

“There was a huge stigma against survivors,” Ballah told me later, as we walked through the clinic’s lobby. “People saw terrible things in Ebola treatment units. But leaving the ETUs, their challenges were just beginning.”

We stopped and greeted another patient, Amos Jessy, an Ebola survivor with yellow eyes, sitting in a plastic chair. As Ballah explained that many of his patients also receive aid from other organizations, Jessy jumped in. “Come down to the ground and ask the survivors themselves whether they are getting the relief,” he said. “Life after Ebola is worse than the Ebola virus itself.” 

Lois Parshley is a freelance journalist and photographer.

THE Deep Secrets OF THE *Gone Girl* Era

The most psychologically acute and exciting crime fiction these days is being written by women, who know all the new (and old) places to look for the darkest mysteries.

By TERRENCE RAFFERTY

Illustration by Thomas Allen

O

NCE UPON A TIME, in the smoky, violent neverland of crime fiction, there were seductive creatures we called femmes fatales, hard women who lured sad men to their doom. Now there are girls. It started, of course, with Gillian Flynn, whose

2012 suburban thriller, *Gone Girl*, told a cruel tale of marriage and murder and sold a zillion copies. The most striking thing about Flynn's cool, clever mystery is the childishness of its main characters, Nick and Amy Dunne, the sheer pettiness of the deadly games they play with each other. And the prize for winning is something like a gold star from the teacher: *Gone Girl* takes place in a world in which grown-up girls—and



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boys—will kill for no better reason than self-validation. This is not a world Raymond Chandler would have recognized. On the streets his people walked, motives were more basic—money, sex—and means were more direct. “When in doubt,” he once told his genre brethren, “have a man come through a door with a gun in his hand.” When today’s crime writers are in doubt, they have a woman come through the door with a passive-aggressive zinger on her lips.

For those of us who choose to entertain ourselves, from time to time, with made-up stories of murder, mayhem, and deceit, this is actually a welcome development, because the men with guns don’t do their job nearly as well as they used to. They’re old, they’re getting tired of walking through those doors, and the heroes they used to threaten—lone-wolf private eyes like Chandler’s Philip Marlowe—have practically disappeared from the genre. Like the cowboy, the private eye once embodied male fantasies of rugged individualism. As individualism itself became a less sustainable concept, the popular imagination began to relocate its mythic figures to places farther and farther away from the real-world settings of the old West and the modern city (to, say, the Marvel universe).

I miss those tough guys, with their cigarettes and their hats, but I’ve learned to do without them. I’ve read crime fiction all my life, and like most mystery lovers, I don’t really have a type. As a young reader, I favored Sherlock Holmes stories and intricate puzzles of the Agatha Christie and John Dickson Carr sort, then moved on to the grittier, bloodier private-eye stuff of Dashiell Hammett and Chandler and Ross Macdonald. In my baffled adulthood, I have found myself drawn, more and more, to the kind of dark, fatalistic psychological thriller that

Men with guns don’t do their job nearly as well as they used to.

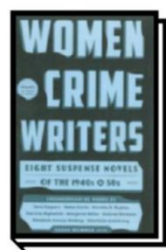
noir writers such as Cornell Woolrich, David Goodis, and especially Patricia Highsmith brought into the world in the 1940s and ’50s—tales of people in impossible situations making catastrophically poor choices.

I do still go back every now and then to the eccentric sleuths inspecting corpses in locked rooms, or to the hard-boiled dicks walking down their mean streets, but only as an exercise in nostalgia.

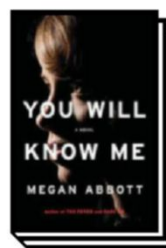
These days, just about all the exciting work in the murder-for-entertainment business descends not from Arthur Conan Doyle or Hammett but from Highsmith, who has had many more daughters than sons. A number of years ago—well before *Gone Girl*—I realized that most of the new crime fiction I was enjoying had been written by women. The guys had been all but run off the field by a bunch of very crafty girls, coming at them from everywhere: America (Megan Abbott, Alison Gaylin, Laura Lippman), England (Alex Marwood, Paula Hawkins, Sophie Hannah), Scotland (Val McDermid, Denise Mina), Ireland (Tana French), Norway (Karin Fossum), Japan (Natsuo Kirino).



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THAT’S NOT TO say the guys are gone, or even going away anytime soon. Elmore Leonard has now left the building, but the lowlifes and criminal idiots who peopled his stories haven’t altogether vanished; George Pelecanos keeps an eye on them for us. And the aging police detectives of Ian Rankin, Peter Robinson, and Michael Connelly are still, at their stately pace, finding ways to make their grim investigations pretty interesting. It’s a struggle,



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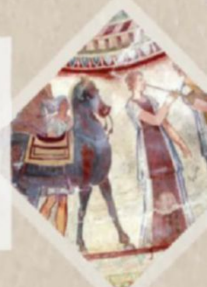
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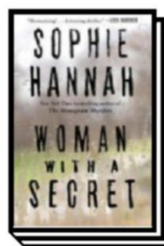
though. Male crime writers seem never to have fully recovered from the loss of the private eye as a viable protagonist, and men, for whatever reason (sports?), appear to need a hero of some kind to organize their stories around. Cops and lawyers and the odd freelance avenger (Lee Child's Jack Reacher) are about all that's left.

The female writers, for whatever reason (men?), don't much believe in heroes, which makes their kind of storytelling perhaps a better fit for these cynical times. Their books are light on gunplay, heavy on emotional violence. Murder is de rigueur in the genre, so people die at the hands of others—lovers, neighbors, obsessive strangers—but the body counts tend to be on the low side. "I write about murder," Tana French once said, "because it's one of the great mysteries of the human heart: How can one human being deliberately take another one's life away?" Sometimes, in the work of French and others, the lethal blow comes so quietly that it seems almost inadvertent, a thing that in the course of daily life just *happens*. Death, in these women's books, is often chillingly casual, and unnervingly intimate. As a character in Alex Marwood's brilliant new novel, *The Darkest Secret*, muses: "They're not always creeping around with knives in dark alleyways. Most of them kill you from the inside out."

The awareness of that inside-out sort of violence sets the women writers apart, these days, from even the best of the men. Women's murder tales have always been at least a little more psychologically acute than the guys'. Even in the so-called golden age of detective stories, the 1920s and '30s, when the emphasis was on elaborate puzzles, the motivations of the culprits in Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers were usually more plausible—and nastier—than they were in Carr or Rex Stout or Elery Queen (a low bar, but still). Later, while male pulp writers were playing with guns and fighting off those wily



THE SECRET PLACE
TANA FRENCH
Penguin



**WOMAN WITH A
SECRET**
SOPHIE HANNAH
William Morrow

femmes fatales, women like Highsmith and Dorothy B. Hughes and Margaret Millar were burrowing into the enigmas of identity and the killing stresses of everyday life.

For beyond-a-reasonable-doubt evidence, see the Library of America's two-volume *Women Crime Writers* (2015), which collects eight terrific thrillers from the '40s and '50s, including the novels that inspired the classic film noirs *Laura*, *The Reckless Moment*, and *In a Lonely Place*. Women have been writing books like those ever since, but until *Gone Girl*, publishers tended to look askance at stand-alone crime novels and instead encourage their writers to develop series characters, which could be marketed

more easily. So the next wave of women—those who began to write between the mid-'60s and the early '90s—turned out stories about private eyes (Sara Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski and Sue Grafton's

Doomy domestic thrillers are what readers want now.

Kinsey Millhone) and medical examiners (Patricia Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta) and humane police inspectors (Ruth Rendell's Reg Wexford). For a while, putting a feminist spin on the old, fading male-empowerment fantasies seemed reason enough for them to write crime stories.

Some of those novelists did solid work in the traditional forms, and many still do. Karin Slaughter, for example, specializes in muscular, action-packed police procedurals; Alafair Burke does expertly plotted legal mysteries; Val McDermid has invented more than her rightful share of homicidal sociopaths for her psychologist-cop team, Tony Hill and Carol Jordan, to run to ground. Donna Leon and Karin Fossum have made significant contributions to the humane-inspector bloodline, and Alison Gaylin and Laura Lippman have managed to create plausible contemporary private eyes.

But they chafe at the limitations; all of those writers have produced books outside their main series. For half a century, the prolific Rendell (who died last year) took frequent breaks from her melancholy, low-key Wexford mysteries to write seriously twisted one-off psychological thrillers, in which the profoundly disturbed and the blithely clueless cross paths fatefully: ignorant armies clashing by night, with no victors. The outcomes are comically, almost surreally, awful. In her most powerful works—*A Judgment in Stone* (1977), say, or *The Bridesmaid* (1989)—fate is inexorable, an onrushing train with no one at the controls. There's nothing for a reader to do but settle in for the ride and watch the darkness speeding past the windows.

IN THE *GONE GIRL* ERA, that sort of novel is having its moment. Traditional mysteries are still with us, but tortuous, doomy domestic thrillers are what readers seem to want now, and dozens of women are ready, willing, and able to oblige. Last year, the publishing industry found, in Paula Hawkins's *The*

Girl on the Train, its long-sought “next *Gone Girl*,” which is to say another blockbuster bourgeois nightmare about terrible relationships, told in the voices of more than one profoundly unreliable narrator. Unlike Highsmith and Rendell, who preferred to ply their sinister craft in a dry, deadpan third person,

“Girls like to reveal their secrets, and they like to be secretive.”

writers of the current school tend to favor a volatile mixture of higher-pitched first-person tones: hectoring, accusatory, self-justifying, a little desperate. Reading these tricky 21st-century thrillers can be like scrolling through an especially heated comments thread on a Web site, or wandering unawares into a Twitter feud. Down these mean tweets a woman must go ...

Compared with their male counterparts, today's female crime writers seem more familiar with (or less wary of) the primordial ooze of ego and id that is social media, the swampy

no-man's-land where millions of self-created personal brands battle for supremacy. It's dangerous territory, as the journalist Nancy Jo Sales shows in a harrowing new book, *American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers*. Sales speaks with dozens of teenage girls—who are, she asserts, “in fact the number one users of social media”—about the peculiar mores of their online world. These kids are *stressed*, looking down at their phones as they navigate from locker to classroom to mall to home, leaning into a blizzard of words and images as they try to fight their way to something like adulthood.

The words are frequently unkind, the images can be downright rude, and not everything, by a long stretch, is true: It's a fun-house universe, a hall of mirrors like the one where bullets fly in the climax of Orson Welles's great noir *The Lady From Shanghai*. Women writers seem to know this place even if they didn't grow up in it. (An awful lot of them—Abbott, Flynn, Hannah, Burke, Slaughter, French, Hawkins, Sara Gran, Attica Locke—are in their 40s, and many of the rest are at least a little older than

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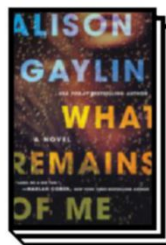
that.) Jessica Knoll, who's in her early 30s, is the only one almost young enough to have actually lived there, and what the narrator of her remarkable debut novel, *Luckiest Girl Alive* (2015), says of her teenage self is this: "We were all young and cruel."

For the older writers, it's a matter of memory, of recognizing in the unlit alleyways of social media the labyrinthine geography of their own not-yet-forgotten adolescent psyches. The teenage mind is a strange and lonely place, and these women know a crime scene when they see one. In Megan Abbott's superb new book, *You Will Know Me*, a young woman in her 20s reflects aloud: "The girl you were at fifteen, sixteen. Angry and nasty. Hungry for love ... You're always that girl. She never goes away. She's inside you all the time. That girl is forever." A male detective in French's *The Secret Place* (2014), after spending a few hours questioning the 16-year-old boarders at a school outside Dublin about a murder, blurts out, "If I've learned one thing today, it's that teenage girls make Moriarty look like a babe in the woods." (For mystery-story innocents, and non-initiates in the cult of Cumberbatch: That's Professor Moriarty, the evil genius who is the arch-nemesis of Sherlock Holmes.) The exasperated cop later admits that he can't quite get a handle on how these girls think. "She was written in a code I couldn't begin to read," he says to himself about one of them. "They all were." But in her amazing, sorrowful book, French manages to crack the code because she was a girl once herself, and like the school's headmistress, she remembers the key: "Girls like to reveal their secrets, and they like to be secretive." Men who don't read these books are missing some crucial information.

The eponymous secret place of French's novel is a bulletin board that's an explicit substitute for social media for the students of St. Kilda's. The boarders are not allowed unsupervised access to the Internet, because, the headmistress



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WHAT REMAINS OF ME
ALISON GAYLIN
William Morrow

believes, "young girls slip between worlds very easily." She fears they could "lose their grasp on reality." So the girls, anonymously and nonvirtually, do more or less what they'd do on Facebook or Twitter or Snapchat. They post photos and clipings and drawings, small confessions and small aggressions, all these traces of their secret selves—jumbled, overlapping, out there for everyone to see. This physical site is of course no more fundamentally "real" than the social media it's meant to replace, but its finiteness makes it appear more graspable. That's an illusion: The girls are in an in-between world anyway, because that's where teenagers live. And in *The Secret Place*, as in real life, that state can be perilous.

PEOPLE REVEALING THEIR secrets and being secretive (often simultaneously) is a fair working definition of social-media culture, and of the post-*Gone Girl* crime novel, too. In book after book, characters *share*, compulsively but selectively, until revelation and artful concealment become nearly indistinguishable. Unreliable narrators—Gillian Flynn's, and Paula Hawkins's in *The Girl on the Train*, and Sophie Hannah's in her recent *Woman With a Secret* (2015), and many others—induce a sort of vertigo in readers' minds, an effect good crime writers strive for.

In the golden age, they'd achieve it by furnishing their cozy murder scenes with too many suspects and too many physical clues—the bickering relatives, the shady servants, the cigar ashes, the restaurant matchbooks, the stopped clocks. Now the effect is managed with language alone. In the dizzying verbal performances of the new-style thrillers, every sentence can be a clue or a red herring. (It may be worth noting that Agatha Christie, who knew how to multiply potential killers and suggestive objects, also created one of the most fiendish unreliable narrators in English-language fiction; to name the book would be a spoiler, I'm afraid.) To paraphrase

T. S. Eliot, who was a lifelong mystery fan, this new wave of women writers do the police—and the murderers and the victims and the innocent bystanders—in different voices. The line between high modernism and 21st-century entertainment is getting blurry.

Crime fiction isn't the worst way of dealing with the too-much-information, too-many-voices overload of the present day. At least it holds out the possibility of a solution, of something approximating truth; that's written into the form's tacit agreement with its audience. In general, readers of mysteries and thrillers have an impressive tolerance for complication. We enjoy the feeling of being overwhelmed by masses of contradictory-seeming data, because the promised resolution, the daylight when the fog

Crime fiction isn't the worst way of dealing with the too-much-information overload of the present day.

lifts, is so pleasurable. It's like the moment of sweet clarity a poet experiences when he or she sees at last the right, the inevitable, word—the one that makes sense of everything. No wonder Eliot and W. H. Auden loved detective stories.

At our bewildering moment in history, the Internet-generated fog is thick, practically impenetrable: a pea-souper (as the Brits say) whose main component is talk, too much of it viscous with ulterior motive. Every voice in the new crime novels by women raises suspicions instantly. We can never be sure what any speaker's agenda is. What's not being said, and why? The verbal gamesmanship can be enjoyable, particularly when practiced by a wit like Sophie Hannah, who specializes in the apologias of middle-class women with incurable cases of the existential jitters.

Her chief narrator in *Woman With a Secret* (published in the U.K. as *The Telling Error*) is Nicki Clements, an apparently ordinary suburban wife and mother, who is one of the funniest pathological liars in recent fiction. Although she seems to be reasonably happy, she lives a clandestine life online ("nickibeingnaughty@hushmail.com"), which, to her alarm, begins to bleed

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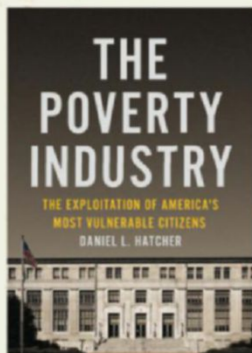
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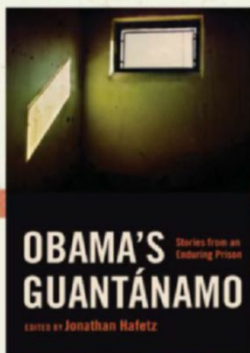
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into her everyday life. There's a grisly murder and a series of mysterious posts on a hookup site called Intimate Links. Naughty Nicki is clearly involved, somehow; the precise nature of her connection takes a while to emerge, though, because in her panicky monologues she doles out actual truth as grudgingly as a Watergate conspirator. She takes that approach (the modified limited hangout, Nixon's men called it) in all her interactions, online and off; this naturally has the effect of making just about everybody—family, police, readers—wonder whether she is, or is not, a crook.

Hannah (who's also a poet) obviously has a taste for the language of evasion and deceit. She loves liars, especially ones who, like Nicki, aren't terribly good at lying. Watching them thrash about in the tangled webs they've woven seems excellent sport to her. In a way, *Woman With a Secret* is the portrait of someone stuck in a sort of permanent adolescence, lying for the pointless thrill of it, for the drama it brings into her insufficiently awesome life. Mostly it's about the writer's delight in linguistic flimflam.

ON THE WHOLE, though, today's crime-writing dames deploy the deceptions and evasions of their shifty monologuists less gleefully, and more purposefully. The dubiousness of their narrators' reliability is for mystification alone—which is a perfectly sound justification in, you know, a mystery. The only problem is that this technique is already, a mere four years after *Gone Girl*, beginning to harden into a convention. The time is coming, and it might not be far off, when dodgy first-person accounts of dire events won't trick anyone but the most gullible readers. The audience for crime stories has been conditioned to anticipate startling, unguessable reversals—what an iBooks promotion that recently popped up in my inbox called “gotcha! plot twists.” If the verbal pyrotechnics that these women writers have been so effectively using get predictable, if their narrators become reliably unreliable, the power to mystify dissipates like the smoke from a fired gun.

Fortunately, the best of the women now writing in the genre have more on their minds than bamboozling

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credulous readers. Thanks perhaps to the current cultural emphasis on youth—on girls in particular—many of these writers have turned their attention to the mysteries of growing up. Frequently their books are as much about old crimes, imperfectly understood, that date from childhood or adolescence as they are about new ones. In Laura Lippman's non-series novels, like *What the Dead Know* (2007) and the new *Wilde Lake*, she likes to shuttle between the present and the past; mysteries are solved, elegantly, but the dominant mood is elegiac.

Brenna Spector, the private-eye heroine of Alison Gaylin's *And She Was* (2012), *Into the Dark* (2013), and *Stay With Me* (2014), has a rare condition called hyperthymesia, which renders her, like Borges's Ireneo Funes, incapable of forgetting anything she's seen, read, heard, smelled, or touched since the disappearance of her older sister, when Brenna was 11. Brenna is a living metaphor for the persistence of memory. Random recollections flicker through her brain as she tries to find missing persons in the present and track her vanished sister down the dark passages of time.

Burnt-out Cassandra Neary, the "last punk standing" who narrates Elizabeth Hand's *Generation Loss* (2007), *Available Dark* (2012), and this year's *Hard Light*, is a variation on that theme. As a photographer, she, too, is a sort of metaphor for the recovery of memories. Her way of apprehending the world is to fix images and look at them as closely as she can, to find what she didn't see clearly enough while it was happening. She needs that kind of aide-mémoire, because both her present-day experiences and her natural memories tend to be blurred by drink and/or drugs. Despite her various impairments, Cass is perhaps the only entirely reliable narrator in women's crime fiction today. Like the camera, she doesn't lie (not to the reader, anyway). She is also, in her rootless middle age, a cautionary tale about the folly of hanging on to youth

too long: She's still on the run, a girl gone for good.

ALL OF THESE WOMEN seem to know that feeling. In so many of the crime stories they've been writing, the sense of loss is overpowering. People die or go missing, of course, because that's the genre, but it's more than that. The crimes in novels like French's *The Secret Place* and Abbott's *You Will Know Me* and Marwood's *The Darkest Secret* come to represent some larger absence, a hole in the coherence of the world. In *Sunset City*, a striking first novel by Melissa Ginsburg (another poet), the murder of a high-school friend sends the young heroine into a self-destructive spin. In emotional free fall, she says to herself, "There were no boundaries anywhere"—which could be the motto of all the lost girls in today's crime fiction.

These are terribly sad books about the confusions of youth and the emptiness beyond.

The title of Gaylin's latest book, a mournful Hollywood mystery, is *What Remains of Me*. Its main character, who was convicted of murder at 17 and spent the next 25 years in prison, knows that not enough does. Devon, the teenage gymnast whose prowess is the focus of an entire suburban community in *You Will Know Me*, is herself a vacancy; there's a murder in the novel, but she's the real mystery. The sisters in *The Darkest Secret*, one a teenager and the other in her aimless 20s, suspect throughout that there are important things they're not being told, and they're right: They're drowning in other people's lies.

These are terribly sad books, about the confusions of youth and the nagging emptiness beyond, and what enables

these novelists to address these subjects excitingly is the crime genre itself—a form that can turn inchoate disaffections into bodies, into dire acts to be investigated. For these writers, it's as if girlhood were a cold case, tantalizingly unsolved.

Although the Chandler-style femme fatale appears to have been laid to rest, maybe she's just been internalized by a generation of crime writers who use their wiles for the different(ish) purpose of literary seduction. Genre aficionados—inquisitive women and melancholy guys like me—fall for it every time. Of course, there's another agenda, and it is (final twist) surprisingly like Chandler's, at least as Auden defined it in his provocative late-1940s essay "The Guilty Vicarage":

I think Mr. Chandler is interested in writing, not detective stories, but serious studies of a criminal milieu, the Great Wrong Place, and his powerful but extremely depressing books should be read and judged, not as escape literature, but as works of art.

In the books I've been reading, the Great Wrong Place is sometimes suburbia, sometimes social media, sometimes high school, sometimes the marriage bed—everywhere something feels missing in contemporary life. The best of these novels are pure noir, velvet and pitiless. Writers like French and Abbott seem to have looked at the history of crime fiction the way Gloria Graham looked at Humphrey Bogart in the 1950 film of *In a Lonely Place*: attracted but wary. They see the darkness in there, and in themselves. They've come a long way from the golden age, from Christie and Sayers, from the least-likely-suspect sort of mystery in which, proverbially, the butler did it. They know better. The girl did it, and she had her reasons. **A**

Terrence Rafferty is the author of The Thing Happens, a collection of writings about movies.

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What accident most changed the course of history?

Nancy Tomes, author, *Remaking the American Patient*

In 1848, the chemist **Louis Pasteur** got a job at a university in French wine country, where he started wondering why wine goes sour. He followed a hunch—it's because of a microbe—and leapt from there to the hypothesis that microbes make us "sour," too. Voilà, the germ theory of disease. We get much longer lives, plus better wine (and beer and milk!) in the bargain.

Jonathan Kay, editor in chief, *The Walrus*

In 1536, **Henry VIII** fell from his horse during a joust and was badly injured. A shocked Anne Boleyn miscarried a male fetus, sealing her fate. The onetime athlete-king would grow crippled, fat, reclusive, tyrannical, and intolerant. How would the Protestant Reformation have ended if he'd remained on that horse?

Laurence Gonzales, journalist and author

In 1928, a dish of *Staphylococcus* bacteria in the lab

of Alexander Fleming was accidentally contaminated with *Penicillium notatum* mold. Ernst Boris Chain and Howard Walter Florey took up the development of penicillin in the 1930s, and the three shared a Nobel Prize for their work in 1945. The number of lives that have been saved by the drug is impossible to know.



J. Kenji López-Alt, author, *The Food Lab*

In 1872, the photographer Eadweard Muybridge set up cameras to take photos in quick succession, in an attempt to settle a debate on whether all four hooves of a horse leave the ground during a gallop. This spurred the development of the motion picture, without which the incomparable deliciousness of movie-theater-style popcorn would not exist today.



Debbie Sterling, founder and CEO, GoldieBlox
Patsy Sherman, along with her colleague Sam Smith, discovered Scotchgard more than 50 years ago during a spill while developing a new kind of rubber for jet fuel lines. Her accident revolutionized cleaning and reminded inventors everywhere not to be disappointed if something doesn't come out the way you expect it to.

Bill Nye, the Science Guy
In the early 1880s, the railroad engineer Beau-champ Tower was studying train-car axles. He drilled a hole in a metal bearing to add some oil, but the cork kept popping out.

So did a stiff wooden peg. He discovered that oils get squeezed to surprisingly high pressures, which any machine has to contain. It's how our modern world rolls.

Sara Seager, professor of planetary sciences and physics, MIT

The glow from a gas in a tube with electric current was persistent. Even when the tube was covered, "invisible rays" lit up a nearby screen with a faint

fluorescent light. Wilhelm Roentgen investigated—and in 1895 discovered X-rays, revolutionizing medical diagnostics.

READER RESPONSES



Eric Hanson, Germantown, Wis.

My vote is a combination of two accidents: **Three Mile Island** and **Chernobyl**. Imagine how different our energy landscape would be today without the reflexive fear of nuclear power thanks to those two events.

T. S. Folke, Skokie, Ill.

June 28, 1914: **Archduke Franz Ferdinand's driver turned down the wrong street in Sarajevo.** Gavrilo Princip, a Serbian nationalist who happened to be on that street, seized the opportunity and assassinated the archduke and his wife, triggering World War I. **A**

Want to see your name on this page? E-mail bigquestion@theatlantic.com with your response to the question for our October issue: **What concept most needs a word in the English language?**

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COULD: PAINTING WHAT'S POSSIBLE

WHERE ART, IDEAS, AND
THE FUTURE INTERSECT

The future has always been hard to predict, but as technology evolves ever more quickly, it can now be just as hard to imagine. At the turn of the 21st century, we didn't even have smartphones. Now we're on the cusp of driverless cars, smart cities, mobile health care, and much more. To understand the next wave of innovations, Qualcomm collaborated with Atlantic Re:think, *The Atlantic's* creative marketing group, to explore the emerging edge of technology through art. The resulting project, "Could: Painting What's Possible," placed Qualcomm researchers in conversation with visual artists to express what that brave new future might look like.

← Artist Chris Dorosz' vision of 5G
is an interplay of space and color.

QUALCOMM
Why Wait?



For more features in the Could series, including insights into how the art was created, visit theatlantic.com/could.

The Space Between

5G: The Network of More

A new mobile network is coming into view, and by 2020 it could make today's revolutionary technologies the standards of everyday life rather than novelties.

5G will handle more data of all kinds more reliably, more efficiently, and from more sources than previous networks. The use cases for it are endless. It will allow smartphones to download movies in seconds and deliver immersive virtual- and augmented-reality experiences. It will connect sensors in agricultural fields that will help us plant and irrigate crops with more efficient use of water and energy. It will support smart cities, connecting sensors in roads to smart cars, smart streetlights, and smart buildings, a vast digital network that will help optimize our energy use and upgrade our infrastructure. 5G will give driverless cars instant-reaction speed, preventing accidents and saving countless lives. And it will be so reliable, real-time, and secure that doctors will be able to perform remote-controlled procedures from across the globe.

Artist Chris Dorosz on 'The Space Between'

Artist Chris Dorosz uses space as his medium, creating works that "examine the fabric of in-between." For "The Space Between," Dorosz built a paint-drop structure, using gravity and interstitial space as building blocks.

"My intent was to capture an 'in-between' moment, as 5G is caught somewhere between reality and imagination," Dorosz says. And when 5G does cross over into reality, it will change the nature of every facet of life. Dorosz visualizes 5G as an intangible connective tissue, present even in our mundane, everyday moments. "In the world of 5G, negative space will be a living fabric of bits and bytes that create their own unseen mosaic."

5G will be the ultimate enabling technology, making our world increasingly safe, intelligent, sustainable, and interconnected. It's the network of more, and it's turning possibilities into realities.

Qualcomm's Role in the Network of More

What will it take to connect the 5G network? As they did with 3G and 4G, Qualcomm is pioneering 5G technologies today. They are paving the path with LTE and collaborating with other industry players to create standards that will provide the connectivity fabric for 5G networks. The company has been developing the technologies for years now, leading the research efforts that will make 5G possible.

Those technologies include the wireless air interface and network architecture that will handle the vast amount and variety of data being transmitted by a connected world. Qualcomm is developing prototype systems to pioneer both those technologies. It is also advancing LTE with new capabilities that will pave the way for 5G in today's 4G networks. After helping to lead our previous mobile revolutions, Qualcomm is a key innovator in this latest version of the mobile network.



When will connectivity be seamless?

We started by connecting the phone to the Internet. Now we're connecting the Internet to everything else. With our innovations in LTE, we are already laying the groundwork for 5G and a future of flawless connectivity—and a smarter, more intuitive world. We are Qualcomm and these are just a few ways we are bringing the future forward faster.

See how Qualcomm is pushing the boundaries of connectivity at Qualcomm.com/WhyWait



Why Wait™

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